PRESENTED TO THE

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

LIBRARY

BY

PROFESSOR B.M. CORRIGAN

CAVALERIE

COLLECTION

OF

BRITISH AUTHORS

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 2039.

MY LORD AND MY LADY BY MRS. FORRESTER.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

CAVALERIE

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

By the same Author,

VIVA	2 vols.
RHONA	2 vols.
ROY AND VIOLA	2 vols.

MY

LORD AND MY LADY

BY

MRS. FORRESTER,

AUTHOR OF "VIVA," "ROY AND VIOLA," ETC.

COPYRIGHT EDITION.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1882.

The Right of Translation is reserved.

PR
4161
B59M8

900679 .

MY LORD AND MY LADY.

CHAPTER I.

"You really think he will?"

"I feel quite sure of it."

"And what shall you say?"

"Mamma!!!"

There is infinite expression in the intonation of that single word. It implies, "Can you doubt me? Am I in possession of my senses? Is there any answer possible but one?"

The mother gazes at her lovely daughter with a look of fondest affection; of deepest admiration.

"Of course, my darling. But,"—with faint hesitation—"there is just this to think of—might you not do better?"

The girl shakes her head. It is a beautifully shaped little head, which genius has forborne to mar by any bumps or excrescences: she has not even indicated the self-esteem that Dorothea St. George has so large a share of.

"That is the way," she answers, with a pretty air of wisdom, "by which so many girls spoil their chances; waiting for something better. It is much wiser, when you get a good offer, to close with it at once. Just think how many pretty girls we know, of three or four and twenty, who have waited, and are not in the least likely to marry anyone worth having now. You see, Mamma dear, I shall be twenty next month!"

"Yes," says Mrs. St. George, with a little sigh. "But Lord Belhaven is plain and *gauche*, and not so very rich, after all. And"—looking at her daughter with the intense admiration that she has never thought it wise or prudent to disguise—"you might marry *anyone*."

"He has twelve thousand a year," returns Dorothea, "and he is not deformed, nor unsightly in any way."

"But, dearest child," (a trifle anxiously), "do you care for him at all?"

"No," says beautiful Dorothea, making a little *moue*, "there is nothing in him to care about. One cannot have everything!"

Mrs. St. George sighs. She thinks her lovely darling ought to marry a Duke with a thousand pounds a day, and the handsomest person in England. Even then it would be His Grace who would benefit by the alliance.

"Tell me again," she says, "what makes you think that he intends to propose to you?"

"All the first part of the evening," relates Dorothea, "he had been standing about in corners of the room, staring at me, until I thought his eyes would have started out of his head, and looking quite fierce and jealous every time I waltzed with anyone. I wondered why he did not speak to me; then, just the last waltz before we left for Lady Dash's, he came up, and asked me for it. I was engaged to poor Charlie, and I knew Lord Belhaven couldn't dance an atom, but I said 'Yes,' of course, and made a sign to Charlie, who good-naturedly went off, though he looked rather glum about it. I went through an awful moment, flying round the room with his lordship. He ground my toes to a jelly; he tore a yard off my skirt, and that mercifully gave me an excuse for stopping to get it pinned up. After that, I said I was hot, and we went into the conservatory. No one else was there, and, suddenly, he caught hold of my hand, and began to stutter and tremble, and talk incoherently, when you, my poor, dear, innocent mother, came round the corner to carry me off. But, as he took me downstairs, he whispered,

"'Shall you be at home at four o'clock to-morrow?' and I said, 'Yes.' It's a great bore, of course, because I should much rather have been driving down to Hurlingham on Sir Henry's coach, but still,

it is just as well to get it over, and, if he had seen me driving with another man, he might have changed his mind. I am afraid," (yawning), "he is rather jealous. It will be very disagreeable if he is."

Mrs. St. George looks at the gilt clock on the chimney-piece.

"It is ten minutes to four now," she says. "What do you think, my love? Had I better be in the room when he comes?"

"No," answers Dorothea; "I think not. You see, it is always so awkward to find an excuse for leaving people together. But, if, after a minute or two, he has not plunged into his proposal, I shall ring the bell, and tell James to let you know he is here."

"You don't think it will look too pointed, his finding you alone?"

"Oh, dear no. If he has really come to propose, he will be only too thankful, and won't stop to think about anything else. Perhaps, too, the very hint of sending for you will help him to the point."

The clock marks five minutes to the hour when, with startling suddenness, the door is burst open, and a young girl, her eyes streaming, her hair dishevelled, rushes in like an avalanche, a tornado, and flings herself on the ground at Mrs. St. George's feet.

A slight frown ruffles beautiful Dorothea's smooth brow; her face expresses a great deal more of dis-

gust than sympathy. The same look, accentuated and intensified, is reflected in her mother's countenance.

"What is it now, Cilla?" she asks, impatiently, without the slightest attempt to soothe the child's quivering frame, or stanch her streaming tears.

"Oh, Mamma, I cannot bear it. I cannot. I cannot!" Cilla gasps out.

At this instant the front-door bell rings sharply.

"It is Lord Belhaven!" cries Dorothea, starting up with an impetuosity quite unusual to her. "Mamma, get her away! She will spoil everything!"

"Cilla! here is a visitor. Do you hear! Are you not ashamed of yourself?" cries Mrs. St. George, and, half leading, half dragging her sobbing daughter, she hurries out of the room.

Dorothea's nerves are fluttering from this little scene when his lordship is announced; but, like a skilful general, she sees in a moment how the situation may be turned to advantage.

"We were just in the midst of a scene," she says, in her soft, pretty way.

"Of a scene?" echoes Lord Belhaven inquiringly.

"Yes. Mamma and I were sitting here together —we were expecting you, you know, because you said you should call to-day."

"Yes!" he utters, eagerly, devouring her with his eyes; his love and passion growing every moment

that he looks at her. Is there any chance of making this exquisite creature his? He is prepared to give all he has for her. He would sacrifice twenty years of his life, could such a bargain be made. I am afraid to think what proposals from Mephisto he might not entertain if the gentleman in scarlet stood at his elbow, and whispered in his ear.

"My poor little sister came flying in," continues Dorothea, putting on a sympathetic air and tone that she had been far from adopting towards the sufferer. "She is very emotional, poor dear child, and she has dreadful fits of crying, and she was in the midst of one of them. Did you hear her as you came up the stairs?"

"No," returns Lord Belhaven; "what was the matter with her?"

"I am not quite sure. Probably it was some dispute with her governess. They don't get on very well."

Lord Belhaven has a kind heart, but, at this moment, it is beating with an emotion so much stronger than that of pity, that the woes of a child in the school-room fail to stir it. Indeed, he only thinks what an affectionate, sympathetic angel Dorothea is to be moved by her sister's imaginary woes.

His heart is throbbing like a hammer upon an anvil; his gray eyes are lighted by an eager fire—he advances a step towards her.

Dorothea's soul waxes faint within her; she feels

like the victim of a wild beast about to spring—she would as lief be sitting in a dentist's chair with the pincers holding one of those dainty pearls, her teeth. If men only knew the agony they inflict by embracing a woman who does not love them! But no doubt they always imagine, as Lord Belhaven does at this moment, that they cannot be repulsive to the being who so powerfully magnetises them.

But Dorothea is as full of courage as the Spartan boy.

"What an angel you are!" cries Lord Belhaven, and then, coming quite close till his eager lips nearly touch hers—"Oh, if you knew how I love you!"

Dorothea would rather not know by practical demonstration—indeed she would like to push him from her with all her might, but she only averts her face as much as maiden modesty demands and trembles a little.

"I am a plain, rough fellow," cries Lord Belhaven with honest passion, "but I love you with all my soul. I am not worthy of you—the loveliest creature God ever made. But tell me that you don't hate me—give me a little atom of hope to live on."

"Oh, Lord Belhaven!" and Dorothea droops her lovely head. But he holds her fast, and presses that kiss to her sweet red lips which is fraught with such rapture to himself, such intolerable disgust to her. Then she withdraws herself from him, not in anger,

but with maidenly reserve. She is not going to have any more teeth out, at all events for the present.

"How happy you make me!" utters Lord Belhaven, whilst his deep voice falters. "I hardly feel as though I were awake. If you knew the agony of doubt and fear that I have gone through since I left you last night!"

"Why should you have feared?" says Dorothea in her pretty, caressing tone, just giving him a little look, and then dropping her eyes.

"Why!" he echoes. "Because you are so sweet, so beautiful, so angelic. Upon my soul," looking at her with ardent eyes, "I don't think you know what you are yourself."

Lord Belhaven need entertain no fears upon this account—few women are more thoroughly aware of their charms than Miss St. George.

"Oh," she answers, with bewitching modesty, and with her own silvery little laugh, "I am a very ordinary young person, only you are so kind as to think more of me than I deserve."

"Kind!" and he makes a gesture that Dorothea has to repel by putting up her two dainty hands to protect her face. No more teeth out to-day, thank you, at all events, until the proposal has been made, and accepted in due form. But she is not by one half so eager to ratify the bond as he is.

"May I—dare I believe that you will be mine—my very own?" he cries, impetuously.

She hesitates.

"I could never—never do anything without first being sure of my dear mother's wishes," she murmurs. "You know,"—sweetly—"Mamma and I are all in all to each other."

Did the man ever breathe, who, being worthily in love with a woman, did not think ten thousand times more of her for showing filial love and tenderness!

"Of course," he cries with emphasis. "But"—anxiously—"your mother, I hope, does not dislike me; has not conceived any prejudice against me?"

"No, no, indeed!" answers Dorothea. "On the contrary."

"I can fancy," says the lover, taking one slim white hand in his, "that she would hate any man who wanted to rob her of you, but I hope not me more than another. May I see her?"

"I will ask her to come to you," and Dorothea rises.

Lord Belhaven puts a detaining arm round her.

"And if—if I succeed in persuading her to give you to me, may I believe that you will consent, too?"

"Yes," falls from the girl's lips, like a pearl.

Then the operation which makes him think of Heaven, and her of the dentist's chair, is repeated.

Dorothea trips down into the dining-room with her fair face flushed, and her lips red, like roses. It is not only her lover's kiss that has given them this bright carmine; all the way downstairs she has been rubbing them violently with her little frilled handkerchief, in her desire to get rid of the embrace.

"Well! my darling!" cries Mrs. St. George with intense eagerness.

Dorothea performs a graceful little war-dance on the faded Turkey-carpet; then she throws her arms round her mother's neck.

"His lordship awaits you, my dear. Go to him, fold him to your maternal breast, but do not sell your child too cheaply. Say that it will be a trial to part with me, etc., etc., and—but I need not tell you—you are sure to say the right thing."

"God bless you, my own darling child!" says the mother, with tears in her eyes.

Dorothea makes light of this blessing, but, under the same roof, there is a bleeding, passionate heart that thinks itself broken, to which those tender words would have been balm indeed. It was Cilla's. To her, however, they had not been spoken; she had been sharply chidden instead. Poor Cilla!

Dorothea throws herself into a chair and sighs. These emotions are very fatiguing. But she is going to be a Viscountess—blissful thought! If one could only be a Viscountess without the Viscount.

"I hope to Heaven," she says to herself, "that he will not always be wanting to demonstrate his affection in that dreadful way; it is really too sickening."

Then she rises, and gets the Peerage from the book-stand: not to study Lord Belhaven's antecedents; that she has done long ago, but to see what a Viscountess's coronet is like; to con over the "Precedency of Women," and to know before whom she will be able to walk out of a room.

"I wish he was an Earl," she thinks, shutting up the book. "But it's a pretty name. The Viscountess Belhaven. Yes, it will look extremely well. I don't think I could have done better—bar the man. He is a bore, but one can't have everything."

Presently Mrs. St. George returns. She is wiping her eyes and betraying a good deal more emotion than the lovely Dorothea has done.

"He is a kind, good creature," she says in a voice that is not very steady, "and he adores you. But who could help it?" and the doating mother looks into her child's face with a gaze expressive of the love, almost amounting to idolatry, which she feels for her.

"Has he said anything about settlements?" asks Dorothea.

"He gave me to understand that he should think nothing too much to give you or to do for you. And now, darling, you must go back to him."

"Not without you, Mamma dear," cries the girl with a little flush—"you must come too."

"No, love; he would rather not have me, I am sure."

"But I would rather—*very much rather*," insists Dorothea. "Besides, you must say 'Bless you, my children!' in the proper, orthodox way. I suppose he won't stay very long. What a mercy that we are dining out to-night! Did you tell him?"

"My dearest child," says her mother anxiously, "I am afraid you do not care for him."

"Don't you trouble your dear head about that," replies Dorothea smiling. "Only promise me, *promise me* that you won't leave me alone with him again to-day."

"But he will think it so odd."

"Never mind—it will make him all the more in love. To-morrow," with a little groan, "I suppose he must spend the day here—lunch and dinner too. And Sunday—such a dreadful day. Oh, I know—I will take him to church to Margaret Street. They separate the sexes there, so I shall get rid of him for a little, and afterwards, we will go and sit in the Park. Pray Heaven it may be a fine day!"

Then mother and daughter ascend the stairs together.

Nothing could be prettier than the little tableau they make in the drawing-room. Mrs. St. George, with tears in her eyes—very genuine tears too—puts

Dorothea's hand into the Viscount's, and Dorothea blushes and trembles a little bit, and looks the incarnation of loveliness and modesty. If the notary and priest had been as conveniently handy as they are on the stage, what would not Lord Belhaven have given his betrothed, and what could he have refused the priest who made her his! But his lover's ardour is not to have full play—the mother remains on the scene in the most provoking manner. Poor woman! she is terribly embarrassed; she feels for Lord Belhaven, and wishes herself a thousand miles away, but she has promised Dorothea.

At last, in despair, he takes his hat and departs, after a wistful look at the lovely face which is his own yet not his own, and feeling, it is to be presumed, very much as Tantalus felt with the delicious fruit hanging just out of his reach.

"Thank Heaven!" exclaims Dorothea, with unfeigned piety, as the door closes upon him.

But as she goes to her dinner-party that evening, she has never felt happier; never looked more bewitching.

On her return home, there is a little packet awaiting her, and a great sheaf of beautiful white flowers.

She opens the packet hurriedly, presses the spring of the ring-case it contains, and then makes a little dissatisfied *moue*. Instead of the three rings she expected to find, there is only one in which are set a

large ruby and a large diamond, both heartshaped, surmounted by a crown of small brilliants.

It is a true enough symbol—the blood-red heart of the man who loves so much, and the cold, hard diamond, emblematic of Dorothea's, joined by a coronet.

Lord Belhaven, however, had no *arrière pensée*, and only chose the ring, thinking it less commonplace than three half hoops. He bought a magnificent diamond cross at the same time, which he means to present to his love in person to-morrow.

Dorothea, of course, does not know this, and thinks the ring rather mean. Mrs. St. George, seeing her pout, says consolingly,

"They are exquisite stones, Thea darling, and large."

"I hate trashy, sentimental ideas," returns Dorothea, more crossly than she is wont to speak. "And," giving a pettish push to the flowers, "I hate loose flowers. They are such a trouble to arrange."

"Cilla will like to do them," says her mother, soothingly. "And she has great taste."

Dorothea retires to bed rather put out. Still she is going to be a Viscountess.

CHAPTER II.

At lunch next day Lord Belhaven saw Cilla for the first time.

She always lunched in the dining-room on Sundays. So did Fräulein Steinman, her governess; but fortunately to-day she had gone to visit some German friends. On other days they had also the privilege of lunching with Mrs. St. George and Dorothea if there was no company. When there was, they were relegated to the stuffy third room, where Cilla's education was laboriously and agonisingly carried on, and got their dinner in a very uncertain and uncomfortable manner.

Lord Belhaven, wrapt up as he was in Dorothea; in admiration and contemplation of her manifold charms, had yet time to look at Cilla, and to be somewhat exercised in his mind about her. She had the most wonderful eyes he had ever seen—she was totally unlike either mother or sister, and she looked distinctly unhappy.

What was there in those eyes? They seemed to him, putting it in a fanciful manner, like the eyes of a soul—they were like lamps kindled by intelligence,

by passion, by grief—they were strangely beautiful and beautifully strange. They seemed not to belong by rights to a material body, but to have ken of something spiritual, more than mortal. Lord Belhaven's mind was not an ordinary one—it was a strange mixture of romance, poetic ideas and feeling, happily leavened with a strong admixture of commonsense and a tolerably sound judgment. He was an enthusiast about beauty; it blinded him, or rather made him wilfully blind to imperfection in the creature who possessed it.

He looked from Dorothea to Cilla, and from Cilla back again to Dorothea, and was puzzled. One sister was the incarnation of sensuous beauty; the other, as it seemed to him, of romance, poetry, passion. But why was she unhappy? With a mother who seemed the kindest soul upon earth; a sister who was softness, gentleness, sweetness itself: how could she be unhappy? "Can she be in love? She looks such a child, barely sixteen, but she may be precocious," he says to himself.

He has spoken to her once or twice; she has raised her large eyes to his; a faint blush has passed over her pale face; she has answered him by a monosyllable.

Lunch is over; he is permitted to enjoy the society of his exquisite love alone, and he forgets Cilla as though he had never seen her. He presents his offering, and is allowed to take out its value in

almost as many kisses as there are stones in the jewel. I fear, in his present humour, this reckless being would mortgage every stick of his property, if he might go on buying rapture at the same price. But Dorothea, who is so sweet and gentle, can be very firm on occasion, and her maidenly modesty will not permit of too much ardour or freedom on the part of even an affianced lover.

It is a warm afternoon. Dorothea does not feel like church; she is half-reclined in a delicious chair. The windows are open, the sunblinds down; and her lover is conversing, in the most interesting manner, about his belongings, and consulting her as to *their* future plans and movements. The idea of Margaret Street is abandoned. Between four and five they will go into the Park and sit under the trees, on that acre or two of land which fashion at this moment patronises on Sunday afternoons.

The engagement has not yet been made public: therefore it would be unconventional for the lovers to appear without a chaperon, and Mrs. St. George, though perfectly willing to sacrifice herself to her daughter, thinks that, under the circumstances, a party of three will be eminently undesirable. She therefore contemplates taking her younger daughter, to bear her company. The mere proposal sends Cilla into a seventh heaven: Cilla, who has so passionate a longing after amusement and pleasure, and who is never allowed to participate in the

gaieties of mother and sister. The only question is, whether this Cinderella can be made presentable enough not to disgrace them; for, though poor Cilla loves fine raiment, and has the true feminine instinct of desiring to make the best of herself, Mrs. St. George has never thought it necessary to expend money, nor to exercise taste in her younger daughter's apparel. Cilla has been compelled to wear great, ugly, shady hats, which have hidden her beautiful low brow and eyes. What did it matter how she looked! So infatuated was Mrs. St. George on the subject of her elder daughter's beauty, that she hardly considered any other girl or woman good-looking.

It was an old-established, deeply-rooted idea in her mind that Cilla was plain, and must be made clever and accomplished, if she was ever to attract anyone. Mrs. St. George positively shuddered at the thought that, after having been accustomed to go into the world with her lovely Dorothea, she would have to present Cilla to its criticism.

"What can you put on? Have you *anything* decent, Cilla?" inquires Mrs. St. George in rather an injured tone, as she and her younger daughter sit, after luncheon, in the dining-room, whilst the lovers are supposed to be in amorous *tête-à-tête* upstairs.

"Go and fetch your hat, that I may look at it," continues the mother.

"It is hideous;" she pronounces discontentedly, when the girl returns with it, ignoring the fact that she bought it herself in the Buckingham Palace Road, for no other reason than because it was cheap. "Really, I cannot be seen with you in that thing!"

Cilla's lip quivers. She is none the more reconciled to disappointment because it is so frequently her lot, and the idea of this walk in the Park amongst the fashionable throng has been like a glimpse of the roses of the seventh heaven to her longing thoughts.

"Oh, Mamma, may I not go?"

"Well, my dear, I suppose there is nothing to cry about if you do not," rejoins Mrs. St. George with that coldness which her younger daughter's sensitiveness always inspires in her.

Cilla turns hastily away ere those lovely, troublesome fountains send forth the drops that are always so near the surface.

Mrs. St. George is reflecting. Her thoughts have not much reference to Cilla's pleasure or disappointment.

"It will be a great bore to have to sit and look the other way, and I shall be dreadfully *de trop*, but to be seen with Cilla in that hat——"

Then she has an inspiration.

"Go and get the little black bonnet which Thea wears to go shopping in—put it on as nicely as you can, and come to me," she says.

Cilla flies to obey.

When she re-enters the room a few minutes later, there is a new light in her eyes; a little smile on her lips. Her mother positively stares: she has never dreamed that her ugly duckling could have so much pretension to swandom as this.

She smiles.

"When you come out, you must always wear a bonnet," she says pleasantly. Then she goes towards Cilla and gives her a kiss.

At this sudden show of affection, the fountains are set in motion again; so sensitive, so swift to receive impressions is the girl's nature, the tears are only restrained by Mrs. St. George saying tartly,

"Now, Cilla, if you are so absurd, you shall not go."

And Cilla, with a mighty effort, controls her *absurdity*.

A pair of long pearl-grey gloves, a lace fichu, a parasol, all the property of Dorothea, are found for the younger sister, and, when the party issues from the door, the mother, happily, does not feel any pang of shame at being seen with Cilla.

It is a lovely summer afternoon—sitting under that leafy canopy through which the sun filters, watching the brilliant crowd that boasts so many pretty, well-dressed women, so many good-looking men, Cilla is in a sort of ecstacy. Oh, happy people, she thinks, who live for ever in this delicious vortex!

She would not have believed that any of them could be bored or discontented.

Many of the men who pass look at her; some turn to look again, and a glow of rapture goes to her heart in which the desire for love, admiration, pleasure, are the all-absorbing passions.

A few young men approach Mrs. St. George and Dorothea, and stay to talk for some moments, but Lord Belhaven's air of proprietorship, his semi-scowl at the intruders, soon drives them away. One or two glance inquiringly at Cilla, but Mrs. St. George does not introduce her to them. It is only when a fine-looking, pleasant-mannered man who stops before them asks point-blank whether Cilla is another daughter, that the mother thinks fit to present her.

"Yes," she says, smiling, "this is my younger girl; she is still in the school-room."

Colonel Lynn pounces upon a chair which a man is just vacating, and brings it to the other side of Cilla.

He begins to talk to her. For a moment or two she blushes, trembles, falters a little as she answers his remarks, and then a feeling creeps over her as though she has known him all her life; her embarrassment dies away—she is supremely pleased and happy.

An elderly admirer of Mrs. St. George joins the group, and monopolises her attention. Colonel Lynn, who is a great favourite in society; who is honoured

by the acquaintance of all the beauties, finds considerable pleasure in talking to this young girl. The object of his life, at the present moment, is to win her eyes to his; those strange, lovely eyes that are like a well which reflects the vault of Heaven, and which innocently tell a thousand tales to a man who is well versed in heart-lore. Naturally, he does most of the talking. He gives her terse, amusing little biographies of the people worth notice around them: no one has a cleverer knack of it than this popular Guardsman; he makes some of his fair friends die of laughing with his stories. But to Cilla he gives the most Bowdlerised version of everything. He has a mighty regard, like all brave men, for innocence.

"Who is that lady?" Cilla inquires, as an elegant-looking woman, accompanied by a cavalier on either side, passes close to them.

The lady, who excites Cilla's curiosity, gives a graceful little nod to Colonel Lynn, and the tall man on her right throws him a "How are you?"

The Colonel doffs his hat to the lady, and responds, "How are you, Duke?" to her companion.

"That is one of the most charming women in London," he says in answer to Cilla. "Mrs. Beauclerc, and the man this side is Duke Vereker, Marmaduke Vereker: a capital, good fellow. He is rolling in money, and he gives the pleasantest parties in the

world. Now, tell me, how does Mrs. Beauclerc strike you? Do you think her handsome?"

"Not exactly handsome," Cilla answers frankly, her shyness having quite worn off by this time, "but such a nice face. And she looks such a lady! When you said, 'How are you, Duke?' I thought she was his wife, perhaps, and a Duchess."

Colonel Lynn laughs.

"Vereker declares that his name is the burden of his life. Servants and people who hear him called Duke, at once address him as 'your grace.'"

"Is he *Mr.* Vereker?"

"Yes, simply Mr. Vereker. The man on the other side is her husband, Captain Beauclerc."

What a history could Colonel Lynn tell to some fair listeners of what the world has said about this trio, but he has no further biographical notice to give of them to the pure-eyed maiden beside him.

Cilla follows them with her eyes, not dreaming how great a part two out of the three are destined to play in her life.

Meantime, conversation between the lovers begins to flag. Lord Belhaven does not possess the invaluable gift of small-talk, and Dorothea takes not the faintest interest in those deeper subjects, of which he is willing and able to talk. He cannot make love to her before a thousand eyes, being naturally shy, and so the pauses in their dialogue

become longer and more frequent. Suddenly he remembers Cilla.

"What is your sister's name?" he asks.

"Cilla."

"But her real name? That is only an abbreviation, I suppose?"

"Lucilla; but we never call her anything except Cilla."

"What marvellous eyes she has! In a year or two she will be beautiful."

"Cilla beautiful!" and Dorothea turns and looks at her lover as though a sudden doubt of his sanity crossed her brain. "My dear Lord Belhaven!"

"Don't call me Lord Belhaven," he utters with tender reproach.

"What shall I call you then?" she asks in her pretty, caressing voice.

"Granville."

"Well then," shyly and daintily, "my dear Granville. Cilla beautiful!"

"She will never, of course, be a tenth part as lovely as you," murmurs his lordship tenderly, "but she will have a beauty of her own. You will see that, in a year or two, men will be madly in love with her."

Dorothea is irritated. She is not jealous. Can the orchid be jealous of the violet?

"But, you know," she says with an almost imperceptible sharpness of tone, "we consider Cilla a

fright. That is why we are making her clever—one must be something now-a-days; either an heiress, or pretty, or clever. Poor dear Mamma is trembling already at the thought of bringing her out."

"I can easily understand," murmurs Lord Belhaven, "that living with anyone so lovely as you would make a person very critical about beauty."

For the moment Dorothea feels happier about her lover's mental condition. He, however, continues.

"But a fright! Why, such eyes as hers would redeem any face from plainness."

"Do you admire them?" says Dorothea coldly. "They are strange, uncomfortable eyes, I think; they are not like anyone else's. They are always reproaching, devouring, or annihilating one."

"Why does she look so unhappy?"

"Oh, because she is perverse. She hates lessons, and she detests her governess, and there are scenes, and quarrels, and tears all day long."

"But why, in the name of Heaven," cries Lord Belhaven, "does your mother keep a governess whom your sister hates? Nothing in this world could be so hurtful for a sensitive girl of that age, as to have bad feelings continually called into play. Why, it may be the ruin of her!"

"It would be all the same whoever it was," returns Dorothea nonchalantly; "she has one of those tiresome, uncomfortable dispositions. And

Fräulein Steinman is so clever, we could never get anyone else like her."

"What do you call a tiresome, uncomfortable nature?" asks Lord Belhaven.

Dorothea looks perplexed for a moment.

"It is so difficult to put it into words," she says. "I mean a nature that is always in extremes. Now, with Cilla, you never know how she will take anything. You may make a remark, not meaning anything unkind, and she will be in a flood of tears in a moment, and then, perhaps, just when one is dressed, she will want to rush at one, and smother one with kisses, and, if you ask her ever so gently not to be violent or demonstrative, she will look at you with those dreadful eyes of hers as though you were the most cruel, hard-hearted wretch alive."

Lord Belhaven leans back in his chair and sighs. He knows what the hunger of the heart is, and he is wondering whether this beautiful creature beside him will ever satisfy it.

"A sensitive nature is a great scourge to its possessor," he says aloud.

Dorothea is on the point of replying, "It is a great bore for everybody else," but she suddenly remembers who her auditor is, and in what relation she stands towards him, and replies sweetly, "Yes," and gives a little fluttering sigh, followed by a successfully stifled yawn.

Passion, sentiment, romance! All these things

are a bore in Dorothea's eyes. To skim, like a butterfly, through the balmy air, brushing with light wing the surface of the gay-hued flowers, symbols of pleasure, ease, luxury, that is the only *rôle* she cares to play in life. Butterflies are made to delight the eye; not to give honey.

Dorothea bends a little forward, to see more of a toilette which has just passed, and, in doing so, catches sight of Colonel Lynn, talking with an interested air to Cilla, and looking at her with eyes in which approbation is clearly written.

"What a mercy for poor Mamma if she should turn out decently after all!" she thinks. "Certainly I never dreamed she could look so well—it is that bonnet."

The crowd is thinning; it is no longer necessary to make dashes and struggles for chairs—there are half-dozens together vacant. Generally speaking, Dorothea enjoys these Sunday afternoons in the Park; she is wont to be the centre of an admiring circle, but Lord Belhaven's air of proprietorship has scared other men away to-day, and the only satisfaction to Dorothea is to reflect that she is going to be a Viscountess, and that the world will soon know it—it will already have made a shrewd guess on the subject, no doubt. The beauty finds her lover dull company indeed; but there is consolation in the thought that when he is her husband she will not be obliged to take all this trouble to make con-

versation for him, and, if things turn out well, perhaps she won't have very much of his society at all.

Lord Belhaven is to dine with the family of St. George. At the Park gates he leaves them to go to his rooms to dress, and Colonel Lynn joins Dorothea.

"Well, my lady," he says gaily, "I suppose it will not be indiscreet to congratulate you."

Dorothea gives him one of her sweet little smiles.

"Thanks," she murmurs.

"Happy Belhaven! By Jove! he is the luckiest fellow in all England! I wish I were he."

"You are much nicer as you are," returns Dorothea with a *naïveté* not altogether unstudied.

"But I am not going to marry you," says the Colonel plaintively. "Don't ask me to the wedding —I shall not come."

Then she smiles and he smiles, and as their ways diverge here, they shake hands and part.

He bids Cilla good-bye last.

"I shall look forward with impatience to your coming out," he says, and the great, speaking eyes look into his with unfeigned gladness, and tell him that she takes his compliment *au grand sérieux*. And indeed she does, and repeats it rapturously to herself thousands of times, and it gives her new courage to face her daily martyrdom with Fräulein Steinman.

"My own darling!" whispers Lord Belhaven in a voice full of passionate tenderness to his betrothed that evening, "if you knew how divinely happy you have made me!"

"If you knew how intensely you are boring me!" thinks Dorothea, but she smiles sweetly at him.

When the clock strikes the half hour after ten, he says reluctantly,

"I suppose I ought to be going."

But he looks almost pleadingly at her, hoping she will give him a little more grace.

"I am afraid poor dear Mamma is rather tired," replies Dorothea. "We must think of her, must we not? Dear, darling mother! she is so good and so unselfish."

Lord Belhaven is amongst the very few of his sex who can lay claim to the virtue just mentioned. Even as she speaks, he rises and prepares to go.

"My sweet love," he says, bending over her, "tell me that you do care a little bit for me. I am not worthy of it, I know. I am a plain, awkward fellow, but," with a humility that is almost touching, "Titania liked Bottom, or thought she did for the time."

Dorothea is not untruthful by nature, but there are cases when falsehood is a positive, almost indeed a sacred, duty.

"Of course I care for you," she says, valiantly repressing the irritation and disgust she feels at the imprisonment in which he is holding her.

Parting may be "sweet sorrow" to his lordship, but it is an intense relief to Dorothea.

"Thank Heaven!" she cries with a mighty sigh, when the hall-door closes upon her Romeo, and she and her mother are alone in the dining-room. "Mamma, I must positively marry him soon, and get it over. This courtship will be the death of me. I never spent such a long day in my life—not even a wet day at the seaside. It has been forty-eight hours long."

"My poor darling!" ejaculates her mother, looking at this Virgin Martyr with the deepest commiseration.

"Yes," says Dorothea, "he is in a great hurry to be married, and it will be a great comfort to get it over. Let me see! This is the second week in June. If he presses it very much, we might be married the last week in July, and we could go abroad for two or three weeks, and be up at his Scotch place the end of August. He must have a man or two there; he can't shoot all by himself! To-morrow afternoon he wishes to drive me out, and we are to go to the play in the evening; so, the first thing after breakfast, we'll go off and order my *lingerie*. I shall have the coronet on everything. I suppose one can trust to the one in 'Lodge.' So stupid; he never has it on his writing-paper. Ah! wait till I am Lady Belhaven."

"Would you order your trousseau quite so soon,

my love?" says Mrs. St. George, with a little hesitation. "Don't you think we had better find out first what he means to do about settlements?"

"Oh, that will be right enough," says Dorothea, with an air of conviction. "He would bestow his head on me, if he could. I shall give him a hint about *his* trousseau," laughingly. "How abominably he dresses! Really, it ought to be pinned on his back that he is a lord."

"It is very odd," remarks Mrs. St. George, "but I think that, as a rule, lords are very common-place looking men, particularly eldest sons."

"Never mind," says Dorothea, "everyone about whom it matters, knows who he is, and the rest don't count. But I certainly shall tell him about his hat. By the way, dear, talking of looks, how much better Cilla looked to-day than usual. I really have some hope that, by the time she comes out, she will be presentable."

"I never was more surprised in my life," answers Mrs. St. George. "And she talked quite nicely to Colonel Lynn, and he seemed amused with her."

"I shall do my best for her," remarks Dorothea magnificently. "But I am certain we shall never be able to trust her. Just when we have found a good match for her, she will be sure to fall in love with a man who has not a half-penny. Do you suppose," she continues with an air of conscious virtue, "that she will never be capable of doing what I am going

to do; to marry a man I don't care two straws about; who is, if anything, rather repulsive to me! I am afraid, dear, you have rather a rough time before you. How dreadful these sensational, untameable, romantic natures are. One might as well let Red Indians, Zulus, or wild beasts loose upon society. How did you ever come to have such a daughter, my poor, dear mother?"

"She is the image of her father," sighs Mrs. St. George. "Of course you don't remember very much about him. You were only six when he died."

"Why did you marry him?" asks Dorothea. "He wasn't rich, and I am sure, if he was like Cilla, he couldn't have been pleasant."

"It does not matter so much about a man being strange," answers her mother. "And you know, when I married him, he was heir presumptive to his horrid old uncle, who, at seventy, married his housekeeper, and had the audacity to have two children."

"The abandoned old wretch!" says Dorothea with an air of disgust. "Then, was Papa always blazing out, like a volcano?"

"Very often. But that was better than when he took a silent and reproachful fit. His eyes were like Cilla's, and he used to look at me in a way that made me feel the greatest wretch on earth without in the least knowing why. I shall never forget one day. He was very clever, you know, and

wrote poetry and that sort of thing. I hate poetry myself."

"So do I—loathe it," interrupts Dorothea.

"Well, it was one day after lunch—a very warm afternoon, and we were sitting out in the garden under the trees. Your poor father took a great roll of paper from his pocket and began to read. So, just for the sake of being civil, I asked what it was, and he told me it was his new poem, and offered to read me some of it. I always feel drowsy after lunch in warm weather, and the poetry had a very soothing effect, so I went off into the most beautiful sleep you can imagine. When I woke, he was gone, and I don't think he spoke to me for three days afterwards."

"Oh, Heaven!" cries Dorothea. "I hope and trust Belhaven doesn't write poetry. Now, dearest mother, do try to be a little earlier to-morrow, and directly, *directly* after breakfast, we will go to Jane Hemstitch's."

CHAPTER III.

Mrs. St. George would have felt excessively injured and indignant had anyone taxed her with cruelty to, or neglect of, her younger daughter. She believed that she was doing the best for her, and even making considerable sacrifices on her account. It would have been far pleasanter for Dorothea and herself if Cilla had been away at school—a governess in the house was a nuisance, but then, girls seldom learn anything at school, and most men have a rooted objection to girls' schools, and infinitely prefer that the wife they select should have been educated at home, and kept under the affectionate watchfulness of a mother's eye.

Years ago Mrs. St. George had settled in her own mind that Cilla's personal charms would be of but a poor order, and that mental ones must be carefully cultivated in her. When one has thoroughly made up one's mind on a subject, it takes a great deal to change it. Mrs. St. George's idea of beauty was fulfilled in her lovely Dorothea—regular features, a perfect skin, a rich shade of golden hair. Then Dorothea had a placid disposition and a temper not easily ruffled, both which good things she inherited from her mother, whom she greatly resembled. The

display of any violent emotion was distasteful and repugnant to both—they had as great a horror of a "scene" as any man. They respected Cilla's undoubted talent—they thankfully admitted that she was clever; but they thought her April-like disposition odious, and regarded her as a nuisance. They could see no beauty in the eyes that were destined later to call forth so much admiration from the other sex, nor were they the least conscious of the native grace, elegance, refinement, which the smallest cultivation would have brought to perfection in her. The very first time they had indulged in the most faintly favourable hopes of her was on this Sunday afternoon, and even then it was the bonnet which had most of the credit.

Cilla's life was a martyrdom. She had a devouring thirst for pleasure, love, happiness; and she lived a life of repression, of misery, of dull, hateful, wearisome routine. Her governess was a person utterly unfit to be in authority over young people, and, to a nature like Cilla's, high-spirited, passionate, sensitive, she was like an iron fetter eating into the flesh. She was over-bearing—she had the brusque, bad manner which distinguishes some of her compatriots; she ate like a pig; many of her habits were disgusting, and Cilla had the most refined instincts, inherited from her father.

The Fräulein had a yellow, parchment-like skin, and the lightest blue eyes. To add to her other

horrors, she had villanous breath, and poor Cilla would sit beside her, compelled to read out of the same book, writhing in an agony of sickening disgust, till sometimes she would have to rush from the room, and give vent to her loathing and disgust in the solitude of her own chamber.

Cilla, who was the brightest, most intelligent creature in the world, and who would have adored learning for its own sake, hated it because of her instructress. She would not exert her intellect; she even feigned stupidity from sheer exasperation. Her music lesson was a daily torture. She had the finest ear, the sweetest voice, the greatest natural taste for music, but she found reading from notes a severe effort, and her tormentor always chose for her the hardest pieces to read, and those most utterly destitute of tune, lest her quick ear should catch it. She was not permitted to, what the Fräulein called, strum, nor to reproduce on the piano from memory the, to her, delicious strains of waltzes and popular airs which she heard in the streets on bands or organs. She was a devourer of novels; she had an absorbing passion for romance; and her governess kindly entreated that all such reading might be kept out of her way, lest it should distract her from her lessons.

But I am thankful to record that there was a good-natured housemaid who befriended the unhappy, tormented child, and who smuggled the

library-books from the drawing-room, and hid them under the mattress of Cilla's bed.

Morning, noon, and night was Cilla chained to her monster, hateful as Frankenstein's: she breakfasted, learned, walked, dined in her detested company, whilst her mother and sister, charmingly dressed, took their pleasure abroad, or received visitors, and amused themselves at home. Sometimes, rarely now, Cilla, in desperation, flew to her mother, but the result was invariable. She was severely rebuked; her naughtiness, evil disposition, and unamiable temper blamed, and the Fräulein's discipline and authority upheld. And this starving little heart was crying piteously for bread, and the mother offered it a stone with the best and most upright intentions in the world!

Mothers, a word to you. If you allow your children, just at the most sensitive period of their lives, to be condemned to the tyranny and companionship of a person whom they abhor, and who is repulsive to them, you are committing a cruelty, a downright sin, which no efforts, nor sacrifices that you may make in after life, can repair. Rather let your children grow up dunces, than have their angry passions, their resentment fostered. Make them happy; not by indulging their caprices, but by encouraging all that is good, kind, amiable, affectionate, generous in them, and by avoiding, as much as possible, anything that can provoke opposition or anger in

their breasts. Show them how blessed a thing is love and kindness, and how more to be desired than everything in the world is the amiable disposition, the unselfishness that earns us the good will of our fellow men!

Cilla, who cared of all things to love and to be loved, was condemned to hate, and to be unamiable; to suffer one of the worst of human pangs, disgust and anger against herself.

Sometimes, Mrs. St. George and Dorothea, when they had been inconvenienced by one of Cilla's outbursts of passion and despair, discussed the propriety of looking out for a fresh governess; but they invariably came to the conclusion that it would be a great nuisance to change, and that there was no chance of ever getting so clever a person again at such a moderate salary.

Now that Dorothea was to be married, Mrs. St. George began to weave fresh plans. She would take Cilla somewhere for a month whilst Fräulein Steinmann had her holiday; after that, she would leave them at home in London together for two or three months, and go about visiting her friends. When she returned towards the winter, she would dismiss the governess, because she did not wish to be troubled with her constant presence, as she really was not a nice person to have about one, and Cilla should have masters and be gradually made presentable under her mother's eye. She was just six-

teen now, and certainly knew a great deal—yes, in the winter, the Fräulein could go, and the following spring Mrs. St. George would bring Cilla out. It would be very different, of course, from the triumphal progress she had made with her beautiful Dorothea, but a woman of her age must have a pretext for going into society, and Mrs. St. George could not exist without it.

Cilla, therefore, was to benefit by her sister's marriage, and, as she had been more turbulent and unhappy than ever of late, her mother thought it wise to hold out some hope to her for the future if she forbore to worry them at present, and if she would learn all she could before the departure of her governess. Meantime, she was kept entirely in the background—her mother and sister were in the delightful turmoil of buying the trousseau and preparing for the wedding. Lord Belhaven, who remembered her even in the intoxication of his happiness, seldom saw her, though he asked constantly for her.

"She shall come to us," he said to Dorothea, thinking to please his bride-elect, "and we will see if we cannot get that unhappy look out of her eyes," but Dorothea scarcely responded.

One day at luncheon he particularly requested that he might be allowed to see Cilla, and, as he was urgent, Mrs. St. George herself went into the stuffy little third room, where Cilla and her gover-

ness were partaking of the lukewarm remains of the repast prepared in his lordship's honour.

"Lord Belhaven wants to see you, Cilla. Have you not finished your dinner?" (it was only conveyed to them by the housemaid about five minutes ago). "There! you can leave your pudding, or eat it afterwards; go and make yourself look decent, for Heaven's sake!"

Cilla obeys, and a few minutes later enters the drawing-room, where Lord Belhaven is standing alone; occupied, in the absence of his beloved, in worshipping before Downey's last counterfeit presentment of her.

"How do you do, Lord Belhaven?" she says shyly, but not awkwardly nor ungracefully, and she fixes her deep eyes on him in an earnest manner, as is her wont when she addresses anyone.

"How do you do, my dear?" says the young man, taking her hand very kindly. "I am going to be your brother, and you must not call me Lord Belhaven, but Granville. And when I am your brother," his eyes shining with happiness, "you must come to us very often, and there shall be no governess, no lessons—we will all be awfully happy."

He sees now how beautiful those eyes can look when they are lighted by happiness; he is drawn towards her and she to him by some strong bond of sympathy—the desire, perhaps, that each has for love and kindness.

"I have brought you something," he continues, and takes a little case from his pocket.

"Oh!" says Cilla, drawing a deep breath and blushing with pleasure and expectation. She opens the case, and finds a lovely ring of pearls and diamonds.

Then those large eyes are hidden by a sudden mist; her lips quiver, she trembles. Her gratitude, her pleasure are so intense as to be almost pain.

"How kind of you!" she utters in a voice full of emotion. "I don't know how to thank you."

"You thank me enough by being pleased," Lord Belhaven says very kindly, "and you must always wear it for my sake, and think of me."

And he kisses her slim hand with a gallantry unusual to him, because he is of a shy disposition.

"We shall be the greatest friends, I know."

Here Dorothea comes in, and Cilla shows her the ring with ecstasy, and the beauty says sweetly,

"How kind of you, Granville! But you are always so good and thoughtful for everybody," and that little compliment, and the smile which accompanies it, bears immediate fruit, which comes to Dorothea the same night in a pair of single-stone, brilliant ear-rings.

She had said, a trifle pettishly, to her mother, at dinner, that she hoped Granville was not going to turn the child's head by making a ridiculous fuss over her, but, when the ear-rings came, she felt how

wise she had been to smile at him, and look pleasant and sympathetic about her sister.

As for Cilla, she was radiant—what, though the Fräulein's temper was unusually vile to day! the girl was incapable of resentment. She exhibited the ring to the friendly housemaid, then to the lady's maid; she called the cook to the top of the stairs to look at it, and, finally, she darted up to the attic, where a deaf old workwoman was engaged on some of the humbler portion of Dorothea's trousseau. This old seamstress was Cilla's safety valve. It was to her the girl carried her woes, her griefs, her passions, her tales of horror, and hatred of her governess. She was generally at work in the house, helping the maid, who had almost enough to do in waiting upon her fashionable mistresses. And, though she was only a poor, little, ignorant old woman, about four feet and a half high, with toothless old gums, a wart on one eyelid, and a back bent nearly double from sewing, she had a tender, sympathising heart, and took a never failing interest in Cilla's woes and tribulations. It was somewhat of a drawback that she was as deaf as a post, but a means was found of diminishing this inconvenience. Cilla took a slate and pencil with her, on which she wrote with a hasty hand the cruelties of her tormentor. Indignation often made her writing a trifle illegible, and the old lady was not much of a scholar, and with difficulty mumbled the words off the slate,

nodding her head sympathetically, and crying shame on the Fräulein.

Sometimes she made a great muddle of the pencilled narrative; then Cilla, too impatient to wait, would go on her knees and shout into her friend's ear, with one eye on the door, in expectation of seeing the enemy appear. Sympathy was all she wanted, and she got it in full measure up in this attic, amongst shreds of finery, from the poor, humble little soul, whose life had been hard enough, and who could yet be cheerful and thank God for all his mercies. Cilla was comforted to know from her friend that she had the sympathy and commiseration of maid, housemaid, cook, and footman, who all voted it a shame that she should be tied to her lessons and that horrid old "Frawline," whom they, too, hated.

In return for Mrs. Pearce's complaisance, Cilla would listen, with the friendliest interest, to her talk about her grand-children; her eulogies of them, and her strictures upon Maria, her daughter in law, who spent her earnings, and treated her with harshness and disrespect. Cilla had heard these stories many and many a time, but she continued to go through a pantomime expressive of surprise, sympathy, horror, indignation at each repetition. Cilla was quite aware that there was a good deal of sameness about her own talk.

The wedding was fixed for the third week in

July, and Cilla was anticipating with considerable rapture the ceremony in which she was to assist as bridesmaid, in company with the Ladies Mabel and Muriel Eton, cousins of the bridegroom, and three young ladies picked from the most select of Miss St. George's acquaintance. Cilla loved fine apparel; it was no fault of hers, poor child, that she was dowdy and unbecomingly dressed, and wore frightful hats which concealed the best part of her face. And on the wedding-day, dressed in palest blue with much soft lace, artificial tea-roses in her bonnet and a bouquet of real ones in her hand, Colonel Lynn, who was present, in spite of his words to Dorothea, pronounced her charming, and several others amongst the wedding-guests echoed his verdict.

"I did not even know Mrs. St. George had another girl," said a mother of two plain daughters discontentedly to a sister chaperon.

"Nor I," replied the other cheerfully, because her daughter was just about to contract a desirable match. "Quite a nice-looking girl too, though of course nothing like the bride."

"I never like those great eyes," said the first speaker. "I expect she has a very bad temper."

Cilla's temper, however, underwent a considerable improvement in the weeks following her sister's marriage. Mrs. St. George was very lonely without her darling Dorothea, and took Cilla out frequently

with her for company. There was scarcely anyone left in town. The girl was no longer shabby and unbecomingly dressed: she too had her trousseau, having come into the inheritance of Dorothea's handsome wardrobe. The beginning of August she went for a month to Ryde with her mother, and spent in that rather dull watering-place so delightful a time that she ever after looked upon it as a Paradise. Her mother was astonished at the change in her; the gray feathers of the cygnet were rapidly moulting, and the beautiful white plumage of the swan beginning to show. She could never, never, Mrs. St. George told herself, take the place of her darling Dorothea, whose thoughts and ideas were moulded exactly on the pattern of her own, but still she would be better, a great deal better, than nothing. She tried to instil a few worldly-wise maxims into Cilla; then, as the girl looked at her with those great, pure eyes, listening in silence, respectful but evidently not sympathetic, the mother had a sort of shamed, uncomfortable feeling, as though her maxims were sordid and shabby, instead of prudent and golden, as Dorothea had found them. Cilla was what is called romantic; there was only one god in the Mythology for her that was Eros. Crœsus was an ogre, a monster; and money, to her unpractical young thoughts, of no more account than the yellow leaves before Midas transmuted them to gold.

At Ryde, Cilla for the first time made friends

with the sea that was in the future to give some of the happiest hours to her life. Two or three of her mother's acquaintances had yachts here, and took Cilla out with them. Mrs. St. George was a poor sailor, and declined excursions for herself unless the sea was like a mill-pond. But Cilla, who fortunately was not a victim to the most horrid sensation imaginable, loved to cut through the dashing waves, and to feel the salt spray and the gallant winds striking her face and blowing back her hair—it gave her a sense of power, of grandeur, of satisfaction.

She was made *au fait*, too, of the little gallantries and flatteries of men of the world, and their pleasant speeches and attentions filled her hungry soul with keen delight. To have been a sad, sorrowful, ugly, tormented child, and to be turned into a charming, considered young woman was to her a wonderful, delightful metamorphosis indeed. She had thought the world a miserable place; she had held very pessimist views in her sad young heart, and now, it was a rose garden, vaulted by an ever-blue sky, where everyone was young, and beautiful, and happy. Sometimes the thought crept over her like a nightmare that she would have to leave this Paradise, and return to her tormentor. Her mother was going first to Scotland, to visit Lady Belhaven, and Cilla was to be left alone with Fräulein Steinman. Lord Belhaven had begged very hard that

Cilla should accompany Mrs. St. George, but the latter was inflexible. "As it was," she said, "sixteen and a half would be a great deal too young for Cilla to be emancipated from the school-room, and she must work very, very hard for the next three months."

Cilla was happy, radiant, affectionate, confiding with her mother—that is, to a certain extent. She would have felt as much ashamed to confess her romantic imaginings to the elder lady as Mrs. St. George would have been to relate to her the little machinations and meannesses by which she had taken and kept her hold on society.

But Cilla had read to her mother some of her poetic effusions, which were really of considerable merit, and had astonished her still more by giving some recitals from Shakespeare with a passion and pathos that caused something like moisture in the eyes of a lady not very susceptible to imaginary woes.

She immediately thought of private theatricals.

There was a piano in their rooms, and Cilla sang to herself by the hour, as her mother dozed after dinner. This gift was also a revelation to Mrs. St. George, for, when Cilla had been called upon to perform at home, she had been so terribly nervous that the effect of her voice was quite marred.

Dorothea married to a Viscount; Cilla changing rapidly from an ugly duckling to a swan, with splen-

did possibilities in front of her! Mrs. St. George sighed, and owned that Providence was good, and sometimes rewarded virtuous mothers.

Cilla, who, at the present moment, asked nothing more than a lay figure round which to wrap and fold the great mantle of her love, began to adore her mother, and, having the most forgiving, the least malice-bearing disposition in the world, forgot that she had been treated with neglect and harshness, and was content that all the past should be blotted out in present love and kindness.

Time sped on with cruel swiftness. It was already the eve of their departure from Ryde. Mrs. St. George had spent a dull month, and was eager to join her lovely Viscountess in Scotland, but poor Cilla was in despair, and, just before going to bed on that melancholy last night, gave way to one of her passionate outbursts of crying.

Her mother was annoyed; Cilla's tears, so far from softening her heart, had an irritating effect upon it.

"My dear Cilla," she said in a cold, aggrieved voice, "I thought we had done with all these scenes."

"Oh, my darling mother!" cried the poor child, convulsed with sobs, "I cannot bear the thought of your leaving me. I have been so happy, and now I am going back to that dreadful woman who always makes me feel angry and ill-tempered and unhappy."

"You should not give way to your evil tempers," remarked Mrs. St. George severely.

Oh, Mamma, Mamma!" wept Cilla, "I don't think I am really ill-tempered: I have never felt cross once in the last month."

Mrs. St. George answered coldly,

"I suppose even the most unamiable person in the world cannot give way to temper with absolutely no provocation. Fräulein Steinman is a very clever person—you would never have got on with a governess if she had been an angel from Heaven. And, remember, it depends entirely on how your studies progress whether she leaves in November."

And Cilla, thirsting for a caress and a few kind words, went uncomforted to bed.

CHAPTER IV.

It was on a gloomy, drizzling day, the first week in September, that Cilla returned to town with her mother. The Fräulein had arrived before them, and the girl's heart sank like lead into the sea as she beheld the detested face and felt the hateful touch of her tormentor's hand once more. Two days later, Mrs. St. George was to start by the night mail for Scotland, and she had so much to arrange in the meantime that Cilla only saw her for a few moments in the day.

The poor child had made grand resolutions; she meant to work; she meant to control her temper; she meant to take life calmly, and not to allow herself to be irritated, but the wound which had been healing all this last month broke out afresh the moment the iron was replaced. It is no use; if two natures are thoroughly unsympathetic, the moment they are brought into contact, irritation and ill-feeling are bound to ensue.

It was the second afternoon following Cilla's return home, and she was seated at her lessons in the little third room, of which the door happened to be ajar. The Fräulein was in a fiendish humour. Mrs. St. George had called her aside after luncheon, and requested that she would not be too strict with Cilla in her absence, and that she would allow her to play on the drawing-room piano as often as she pleased, and after her own fashion.

Cilla was feeling weary and oppressed. The early afternoon is an abominably bad time to study. She had gone through a long hard morning's work, and after the freedom, the indolence and the fresh breath of the sea, this small stuffy room, giving on the wall of another house, and the continued strain on her mind, were intolerably oppressive.

Suddenly there was a knock at the door. Cilla pricked up her ears. The servant answered it, and she heard a cheery voice she knew asking for Mrs St. George.

It was Colonel Lynn, and, as the servant answered in the affirmative, he came in. Cilla flew to the door and peeped through the little opening.

"Cilla, what are you doing there!" cries the Fräulein in an irate voice, but her pupil heeds her not. "Come away from the door directly!" shrieks the Fräulein. Still Cilla lingers. "Sit down this instant!" screams her governess still louder, whilst scintillations of wrath gleam from her light blue eyes.

"I am tired—I *cannot* work this afternoon," says Cilla, returning to her seat. "I want air."

"Such laziness!" mutters the German, glaring at her. "That comes of long holidays."

Cilla is on tenter-hooks. She thinks, hopes, agonisingly desires that her mother may send for her. The long minutes crawl on, broken only by the goadings of her governess, and then Colonel Lynn's step is heard descending the stairs, and his cheery voice, uttering parting words.

"Remember me to Miss Cilla," he is saying. "Tell her how awfully disappointed I am not to see her. And my kindest regards to Lady Belhaven. It is very hard lines to lose my shooting this year, but we poor soldiers——"

He finishes his sentence with a laugh, and goes. When the door has closed upon him, Cilla presses her hands to her face, and a couple of tears ooze through her fingers.

"That is pretty," cries the Fräulein sardonically; "so maidenly, so modest to cry after a gentleman."

And, to distract her pupil's thoughts, she immediately gives her a difficult piece of German grammar to study.

The days went by. Mrs. St. George had joyfully departed for Scotland, and Cilla was left alone in prison, to the tender mercies of her gaoler. The thraldom was more cruel than ever, for her old friend, the work-woman, had departed, her occupation being gone with Dorothea; the good-natured housemaid had married, there were no library books to read, and the girl's sole amusement and resource was the piano, on which she infuriated the Fräulein by "strumming," as that lady called it. The poor child tried to buoy herself up with the thought of her coming freedom, but December was such a long, long way off, and Mrs. St. George, afraid to give the governess her three months' *congé* in person, had deferred making the announcement to her until she could do so by letter. When the Fräulein received the intimation, her temper became more unbearable than ever, and Cilla began to cast about in her mind whether she would openly revolt, run away, or drown herself in the Serpentine. Little did she dream how near was her emancipation, nor by what terrible means it was to be effected.

One evening, some three weeks after her mother's

departure, she was sitting at the piano in the back drawing-room singing melancholy little songs to herself; songs in harmony with her own mental depression, and dismal thoughts of life. Her surroundings were eminently suggestive of gloom: the furniture was shrouded in holland, the large pieces, covered with old sheets, looking particularly ghostly. One candle alone illumined the darkness, and every now and then an uncomfortable nervous sensation would creep over Cilla, who was somewhat given to vague terrors.

All at once the door opened with startling suddenness, and a man entered. Cilla jumped up with a little shriek, more frightened than ever when she recognised Lord Belhaven. His face was grave and anxious: in an instant she divined that something was wrong.

"What is it? Mamma?" and her terrified eyes looked wildly at him.

He stooped, and kissed her cheek with a tenderness that confirmed her worst suspicions.

"My poor little girl!" and he drew her to the sofa. "I have some bad news for you. Your poor mother is very ill."

Cilla sat staring at him with a white, scared face, full of terrible anticipations. He had taken one of her hands, and was stroking it kindly, feeling as wretched as a good-hearted man always does at

being the bearer of evil tidings. But he summoned up courage, and went on.

"She had been suffering from neuralgia, and, two days ago, we had the doctor to her. He sent her a medicine and a lotion, and did not take the precaution to put the two things in different coloured bottles, nor even to label one 'poison,' and—and—in the night, she took the wrong one by mistake. Everything was done that could be done, but we fear——"

Cilla had snatched her hand from him, and flung herself upon her knees.

"Oh, God!" she cried with an agony of intensity. "Save poor Mamma! Save poor Mamma!"

And she clasped her hands together, and gazed upwards, as though her eyes could pierce the ceiling to the vault of Heaven. Lord Belhaven's mouth worked; a dimness came before his eyes. Then he drew Cilla gently back to her place beside him, and murmured,

"My poor, dear little child; it is too late."

Then Cilla understood him, and, trembling, she gasped out—

"Oh! what shall I do? What shall I do?"

A blinding rain of tears fell from her eyes; her slight frame was convulsed with sobs, and Lord Belhaven laid her head against his shoulder, and stroked her hair, and soothed her with kind, tender words, as though he had in very deed been her

elder brother. And, even in the midst of her anguish, there was a strange comfort to Cilla in his tenderness. It was something so new to her to have a heart on which to lean her head, and sheltering arms to enfold her in her misery.

He let her cry unrestrained until the first paroxysm was over. At last, between her sobs, she asked news of Dorothea.

"Has it not killed Thea?" she said.

It seemed to her that, if her heart was broken, what must Dorothea feel, who had been the mother's idol; her constant companion from childhood!

"Poor darling!" answered Lord Belhaven. "She is bearing up wonderfully. Mrs. Wentworth is with her. I have come up to—to make arrangements, and to tell you. I would not have you written to."

Cilla faintly pressed his hand in thanks.

"Does—does Fräulein Steinman know?" she asked.

"I told the servant who let me in to tell her. I shall come and see you in the morning," he said, preparing to depart. "And—and—I will send some one round from Jay's, to see about your mourning. Leave everything to them, to provide what is proper."

Cilla felt inclined to cling to him, and beg him not to go away. She shrank more than ever from her unsympathetic governess in this hour of anguish, but she restrained herself, and only said, with her great eyes fixed imploringly upon him,

"You *will* come to-morrow? You promise?"

And he promised, with unmistakable sincerity.

Cilla lay awake half the night wondering what was to become of her. The future was a terrible blank. She dared not hope that Dorothea would take her. Would she be sent to school? Then her thoughts reverted to her mother. "Poor dear Mamma! Poor, poor Mamma!" and her sobs burst out afresh.

The tenderest, fondest mother could not have been lamented with more heart-felt grief.

Mrs. St. George's remains were to be brought from Scotland, and buried beside her husband in Kensal Green.

Every day Lord Belhaven came once or twice to see Cilla, and each time he found her whiter, more woe-begone. Her face haunted him. She had not had courage yet to speak to him of the future.

It was the evening of the funeral: on the morrow he was to return to Scotland, and he came to see her for the last time. He, too, had been exercised in his mind about this poor, pale, sorrowful child. He had had plans and ideas about her, but they had been over-ruled by Dorothea. As she advanced to meet him in ber deep mourning, her face whiter, more sorrowful; her eyes larger, more intense than ever, it struck him that it was a positive brutality to leave her with no one but a cross-grained, unsympathetic German, whom he knew she disliked.

But the child had made up her mind to speak, and as he sat beside her on the sofa she broke out suddenly,

"Oh, Granville, what is to become of me!"

Lord Belhaven's answer was on his lips when he remembered Dorothea's injunctions. "She *must* go on with her governess till Christmas. I can't have that woman in my house; they can go on living together for the present, and after Christmas the furniture will be sold and the house let."

Lord Belhaven braced himself up to speak, very much against his inclination.

"My dear child," he said, "you are so young, only sixteen and a half, you know, you must go on studying a little longer. Dorothea thinks, that is, we think if you would just go on as you are till Christmas—"

Then with a sudden movement Cilla flung herself on her knees before him.

"Oh, Granville, I implore you, don't leave me with *her!* I cannot bear it. I would rather die. Oh! if you knew the torture my life is with her, you would not condemn me to it! Oh, have pity upon me! have pity upon me!"

There was such terrible pathos in her voice, such eloquence in her streaming eyes, that Lord Belhaven's mind was made up in an instant. He idolised Dorothea, "but, great God! one has a heart in one's body!" he said to himself later, when a

misgiving about his prudence in going against his wife's wishes crossed his mind.

"Say no more, my child!" he said, lifting her up—"you and Dawson" (her mother's maid) "go to Scotland with me to-morrow. I will see the Fräulein, and give her her *congé*."

Cilla was almost frightened.

"Oh!" she stammered, "what will Dorothea say!"

"She is your sister," he replied, "and she will receive you with open arms."

In his heart of hearts, he was not quite so positive on that score.

"Go, my dear," he continued, in his cheeriest voice, "make all your arrangements, and ask Miss Steinman to be so good as to come here and speak to me, or, if she prefers it, I will go to her."

Lord Belhaven passed rather a *mauvais quart d'heure* with the governess, who was furious, and did all she could to oppose him. Mrs. St. George would not have wished it—Lady Belhaven did not wish it—she had received that morning a letter from her ladyship containing her views about Cilla's immediate future.

Lord Belhaven replied that, when he had explained matters to her ladyship, he was certain that she would approve of what he had done, and that his decision was irrevocable.

The Fräulein considered herself grossly ill-

treated—to be turned away after long and valuable services like a dog.

Lord Belhaven assured her that, on the contrary, every consideration should be paid to her comfort and convenience—that she could remain in the house until she had provided herself with another abode, and that, pecuniarily, she should not in any way be a loser.

He was polite but determined; the governess was so irate that she exhibited frankly to him the charming disposition with which she was gifted, and, when he left the house, he said to himself over and over again,

"Thank God I decided to take the child away from that fiend! I should have been the most infernal brute alive to leave her."

Next day he and Cilla and Dawson, who had performed prodigies in the way of packing, were speeding to the North. Lord Belhaven had telegraphed to his wife, "Cilla is coming with me. When you hear all, you will know I was right."

Her ladyship, as it happened, was anything but pleased by the receipt of this intelligence, and her lovely face puckered into a very decided frown.

"What on earth am I going to do with that uncomfortable child?" she said to herself pettishly. "I hope she will not be making scenes here. If she does, I shall pack her off to school."

But, after her first feeling of irritation had sub-

sided, being naturally of a placid and easy-going disposition, she made the best of it.

"She and Bel can enjoy their highflown ideas together," she reflected. "After all, Cilla may be very useful in taking him off when he bores me. Perhaps he will find her sympathetic. All your tiresome people who can't be like the rest of the world want sympathy. I hate the very word."

So Dorothea decided to make the best of it, and, as she never showed temper nor unamiable feeling, she received Cilla in a pretty, sisterly way, although she was horribly bored by the girl flinging herself on her neck and bursting into tears, called forth by the divided emotions of grief and joy.

Lord Belhaven was in such a state of rapture at seeing his darling again, that he almost forgot Cilla, and everything else. Her ladyship found it convenient to check his extravagant demonstrations by saying gently,

"It seems heartless, with poor dear Mamma only just dead, to allow ourselves to be happy," and her husband, sadly and reluctantly, respected the sorrow which animated her reproof.

"I wonder," thought Dorothea, "what would happen if two volcanoes like Bel and Cilla came together? There would be only smoke and ashes left, I suppose," and she smiled to herself at her own humour.

She had left off calling her husband Granville.

"It is such a mouthful," she said, "and I can't call you Granny. I shall say Bel, as all your men friends do. They won't be able to call us 'Bel and the Dragon,' will they?"

When the exuberance of Lord Belhaven's joy at being reunited with his darling had been tempered by her gentle melancholy, he remembered Cilla.

"It would have been a positive crime," he said, "to leave the poor child with that detestable woman. She is the most unsympathetic woman I ever saw."

Dorothea smothered a yawn. The word sympathy invariably produced that unpleasant affection of the jaws with her.

"Upon my soul!" he proceeded with warmth, "I cannot conceive how she ever stood the life so long. I wonder your poor mother——"

"Oh, please don't say a word against poor dear Mamma!" interrupted Dorothea. "I could not bear it. Whatever she did was always meant for the best."

"My darling love!" cried Lord Belhaven, "I would not blame her for the world now she is gone, poor soul. Only I don't think people sufficiently appreciate the importance of sympathy" (Dorothea yawns again) "in our relations with those about us. Cilla, with her intensely sensitive organisation—"

"You will be better able to judge of Cilla when you have spent a few weeks under the same roof with her," interrupted her ladyship, with some dry-

ness. "She is not so easy to manage as you seem to think. And what is to become of her education? She is only sixteen and a half. I hope, my dear Bel, you do not propose my saddling myself with a governess, and setting up a school-room?"

"My own sweet love!" said Lord Belhaven, just a little bit *froissé* by her tone, "do you think I would do anything in this world that could vex or inconvenience you? And though Cilla is so young, it is amazing what she knows. She speaks French and German perfectly; she plays and sings divinely —in fact——"

"In fact she is quite a paragon," remarked Dorothea sweetly.

"She can have masters when she has a chance, and she and I might study a little together. I know she could teach me heaps of things."

"Ah!" said Dorothea, looking bored, "that will be delightful. You will be able to work off some of your exuberant vitality upon each other. I hope you two wise people won't make me feel too foolish."

"Dorothea!"

But as the reader will hardly be interested to hear the extravagant laudations of an enamoured husband, he shall be spared Lord Belhaven's further remarks.

The days went on, and Cilla's altered experiences and mode of life made a new creature of her. No sister was ever more devoted to brother than she

became to Dorothea's husband. His kindness was like rain upon her parched heart: the absence of opposition and harsh control transformed her entirely —if it had not been for her grief at her mother's death, she would have been the happiest of the happy. She had never travelled—the Scotch scenery, its mountains, forests, lakes, its colouring, its grandeur, sweetness, and stillness, filled her heart with unutterable emotion. She was not of a gushing disposition—her raptures made her silent; it was the intense look in her eyes, the quiver of her lip, the involuntary closing of her hands, that told Lord Belhaven's sympathetic heart what she felt under the influence of these new scenes.

They were the most congenial companions; he could talk to her on subjects that would have made Dorothea yawn till her jaws ached, and she listened with an interest, an intelligence that charmed him. And they had so many ideas in common; they were not ashamed to tell each other of the throes their heart-hunger had made them suffer—the word sympathy was as sweet to them as it was tiresome to Dorothea.

Lord Belhaven listened with the greatest interest to Cilla's reminiscences of Fräulein Steinman, and thanked God from his heart that he had been the means of rescuing the girl from her martyrdom. She was not idle; she read and wrote French and German; she practised; she cultivated in secret her

talent for reciting, and learned her favourite poems by heart.

When Dorothea, as was often the case, was not inclined to accompany her husband in his drives and walks on non shooting-days, Cilla took her place, and though Belhaven was too much in love not to have desired the company of Dorothea in preference, the excursions made with Cilla were really productive of more pleasure to him in the end. Dorothea smiled sweetly at him, but she had not much to say; she did not care a straw for nature, and he felt that she was bored: a cruel feeling to experience in the society of one's heart's beloved. In the evening Cilla played and sang, and Belhaven sat at his beautiful wife's feet and looked into her eyes with the rapture born of his passion and Cilla's pathetic music, and felt more near to being divinely happy than he had ever done in his life. If the same woman could have created the sentiment and the passion, it would have been Heaven at once; but, even in his most adoring moments, Belhaven could not help realising that the charms of his exquisite wife were of the person, and not the mind.

Dorothea was agreeably surprised at the change in her sister. There were no scenes or storms now. Cilla's great desire seemed to be to please, and to be kind to everyone. Nothing, however, astonished Lady Belhaven so much as the alteration in her appearance. Dawson, (the maid), took a great in-

terest in her young lady, and in making the best of her, and Cilla, having the keen love of approbation which is born in every sympathetic woman, was only too glad to lend herself to Dawson's laudable efforts.

"Really," said Dorothea with great emphasis to her husband, "I could not have believed Cilla would turn out so well. I think she will be almost pretty."

"She will be more than pretty," answered Lord Belhaven; "she will be charming. More than one man's heart will ache for her sake. I hope to God," with great earnestness, "that she will take a fancy to some good fellow who will understand and be able to sympathise with her."

"I hope," returned Dorothea lightly, "that she will make a good match."

He turned suddenly towards her.

"Did you marry me because you loved me, or because I was a good match?" he said, and then, before she could answer, he stopped her lips with a passionate kiss, and, crying "No, no, don't answer me!" dashed from the room.

"Oh, these volcanoes!" murmured Dorothea wearily. And then she proceeded to run over in her mind the men of her acquaintance who were eligible as *partis* for Cilla.

CHAPTER V.

It is a November afternoon. Outside all is chill and dark, but in this room to which I bring the reader there is comfort, warmth, luxury. The firelight alone illumines it, but the logs in the wide chimney are sending forth such bright, fierce flames that you can see into every corner. The panelling, the chimney-piece are of dark, carved oak; there is one large, latticed window, across which the heavy velvet draperies have not yet been drawn. On the wall are many pictures, whose frames look bright in the cheerful blaze, though their subjects, for the most part, can only be guessed at. There are a few massive pieces of furniture, old inhabitants evidently, and then, to tell the stranger who glances in that women live here, there are dainty occasional tables, on which are set glasses filled with flowers, satin and lace work-baskets, library books, and, near the fire, a semi-grand piano standing open. The room is tenantless—so thinks a man who looks in at the half-open door, but another glance shows him a picture which he finds so attractive that he remains to take a longer view of it. A slight, girlish form is buried in a vast arm-chair in one chimney-corner, her dress and the velvet of the chair are so dark

that only her pale, oval face and two very white, taper little hands come into relief.

Until he can make up his mind whether to advance or retreat, the stranger continues to look at the unconscious occupant of the big chair. She is gazing dreamily into the fire, and he remarks that she has very large and beautiful eyes, and that she is not at all like most girls, particularly the young ladies of fashion, who are his acquaintances.

Marmaduke Vereker, the man who stands in the doorway, is not good at analysing sensations, nor does he ever trouble himself to attempt so laborious a mental effort—he only knows, or cares to know, that this slender figure interests him even at first sight: an extremely rare occurrence, one which has, indeed, as far as he knows, only happened to him once before in his life, and then with the most serious and lasting results.

The unexplained magnetic attraction which draws the eyes sooner or later of the gazed upon to the gazer causes Cilla, deep as she is in reverie, to turn her eyes towards the door, and behold a very big, manly form looming there.

She gives a little cry of terror, for she is of a highly nervous disposition, being one of those who, fearless in actual danger, are ready to die of agony at an unexplained noise or sudden apparition. This cry and the momentary look of fear in the girl's

startled eyes bring Mr. Vereker into the room in a hurry, and he comes straight up to her and says,

"I frightened you. How awfully sorry I am!"

But Cilla has grasped the situation even before he reaches her, and rising, her face bedecked with a beautiful blush, she says,

"I did not hear your step. You are Mr. Vereker."

With this, she offers her small hand to his ready clasp, and looks up at him.

What she sees is eminently agreeable. It is a gentleman, distinctly a gentleman, of six feet two in height, whose breadth does justice to his stature; a very pleasant face, with blue eyes, a big nose, and a mouth which, if not curved like Cupid's bow, has two rows of white teeth that are even more important to good looks. He is not perhaps handsome; he is a fine man, and what women call a *nice*-looking man. His age may be about two or three and thirty.

These details Cilla masters at a glance, whilst he, with his duller senses, has by no means taken a thorough inventory of her, but has only arrived at the conclusion that she pleases him.

"This comes of taking liberties," he remarks with a smile. "I forgot, now Belhaven is married, I must not run in and out as I used to. I drove round to the stables and came in the back way."

"But they were expecting you," Cilla hastens to assure him. "They have gone to return a visit

rather a long way off, but they will be home very soon now. Will you have some tea?"

Cilla, not yet having been introduced to polite society, does not supplement her offer with, "or some sherry and bitters, or a brandy and soda?"

"Are you going to have any?" inquires Mr. Vereker, and she responds in the affirmative and rings the bell.

"And how do you like Blankshire and Red Meade?" asks Duke, by which name he is known to all his friends and acquaintances. For the Belhavens and Cilla have left Scotland, and are established at Lord Belhaven's country seat.

"I like it very much, but it seems a little tame and flat after Scotland," answers Cilla.

"It's a glorious country for hunting," says Duke with enthusiasm. "Do you hunt?"

"No. I am only just learning to ride. Granville is teaching me; he has bought me such a beautiful horse."

"Granville!" repeats Mr. Vereker inquiringly.

"Lord Belhaven."

"Oh, Bel! I didn't know he had any other name than Bel. And you are—and he is your——"

"Brother-in-law," supplies Cilla. "Lady Belhaven is my sister."

"Your sister!" echoes Duke in a tone of surprise. "You are not a bit like her."

"No," says Cilla.

And even Duke, who is not very quick at reading faces, sees the mortified look that creeps into the girl's face.

"There are different styles of beauty," he says blunderingly. "Now I——"

But the advent of tea and the stimulants, which the butler, who knows Mr. Vereker's habits, brings without orders, cuts short his sentence.

"Shall I open the soda-water, sir?" says the servant.

"No, thank you, Humphreys. I am going to have some tea."

Humphreys would have stared had not the inner consciousness that he would lose caste by doing so prevented him.

Whilst Cilla pours out the tea, Duke watches her with a sort of fascination. He accepts both cream and sugar from her, though the whole thing is nauseous to him, and then he carefully, after pretending to sip it, carries the cup away to a little table, as though he has finished it, and it is empty.

Why Duke, who is in the habit of drinking brandies and sodas at all times, and in all places, when he feels disposed, should have an instinct that there is a sort of profanity in following his custom in this young girl's presence, I am unable to say. The fact remains.

A quarter of an hour has elapsed since they

first made acquaintance, and they are talking as if they were old friends. Duke, who finds conversation with almost every woman but one rather uphill work, has plenty to say, and, young as she is, Cilla having the natural sympathy of which tact is only an imitation, is not afflicted by shyness or *gaucherie*.

"Do you live with your sister?" Mr. Vereker inquires, and Cilla, lowering her eyes and speaking with a certain tremor in her voice, says,

"I have no one else now since poor Mamma——"

"Of course, of course," interrupts Duke awkwardly. "But you are very young; at least, you look so. You are not out yet, are you?"

"I am sixteen and a half," she says with perfect frankness.

"Quite a child," he remarks, looking at her with increased interest, and feeling that there is a great deal of the woman in her already.

"And you don't go to school?" he inquires.

"I have never been to school," she replies, and then, as though she had known him all her life, she tells him how Belhaven (or Granville, as she calls him, because he likes it) rescued her from her miserable life with her governess.

"He's a thundering good fellow is Bel," says Duke approvingly. "It would have been an awful shame to leave you with that old cat. I shall often be at my place now I've got you for neighbours. Lady Belhaven must come over and see me, if I can

persuade her, and bring you. Are you fond of animals?"

"I love all animals," Cilla answers with kindling eyes.

"So do I. I don't think anyone can be much good who doesn't," answers Duke, unconscious that he is paying a tribute to himself, whilst merely desiring to offer one to her.

"I used to think so," she says gravely. "But, do you know, that some of the most wicked and cruel people who ever lived have been devoted to animals?"

"No! Not really!" exclaims Duke rather shocked at this upsetting statement. "Do you like cats?" somewhat abruptly.

"Yes, cats, dogs, horses; everything," answers the girl.

"When you come over, I'll take you round my stables," pursues Duke. "I've got the most splendid lot of cats; all English tabbies. There's one for every horse, and they sit on their backs, and never make a mistake about their own."

"Really!" cries Cilla, deeply interested.

"And I've got a lot of dogs, too," continues Mr. Vereker, warming to his subject. "A collie and two retrievers in the house, and a terrier, Jack. You shall see him catch rats."

"No, no," exclaims Cilla. "I would not see it for the world. I *hate* anything cruel."

Duke looks a shade perplexed. It has never occurred to him that there is any cruelty in killing rats.

"But they've got to be killed, you know," he says apologetically.

"Perhaps," she replies. "But I cannot understand how there can be any pleasure in *seeing* anything tortured."

Duke reflects a moment, and is rewarded by an inspiration.

"I don't think, after all," he says, "that it is the pleasure of seeing the rats killed. It's the pluck of one's dog that one likes. Such a bit of a fellow; and he goes in and tackles a great rat as if it was a mouse."

Cilla accepts the explanation. She likes her new acquaintance, and would be sorry to think anything to his detriment.

"Never mind," remarks Duke heartily. "I'll take care you shall only see what you like when you do come."

Here the door opens, and Lord and Lady Belhaven enter.

"So sorry not to be here to receive you," says her ladyship in her pretty, gracious way.

"By Jove! she *is* a lovely woman," thinks Duke, "but——" and he steals a look at Cilla.

"Your sister has done the honours," he says smiling. "We've been getting on tremendously."

"That is right," returns Dorothea approvingly. "Cilla dear, I hope you've got a nice hot cup of tea for me. We've had such a cold, wretched drive."

Cilla, who never forgets the comfort of anyone, takes the cosy from the tea-pot, and supplies her sister, whilst Lord Belhaven and Duke are assiduous in waiting upon her.

"I'm so glad you've come to the Court," says Dorothea with a sweet smile. "Do tell me that you are going to stop! it is so very dull and quiet here. Of course, just at present, we cannot have people to stay," and she drops her eyes, but Duke remarks to himself that she betrays much less feeling in alluding to her loss than her sister had done.

"I shall be here, on and off, all the winter," he rejoins. "My sister is coming to-morrow. Now, Lady Belhaven," putting a tone of genuine entreaty into his hearty voice, "I want you to do me a great favour."

Dorothea smiles upon him in a manner that augurs well for the success of his prayer.

"I want you and your sister, and Bel, of course, to drive over the day after to-morrow, and dine and stay the night."

Her ladyship's smile fades into gravity.

"You know," she says gently, "we do not go anywhere at present."

"But you will not mind my sister," he pleads.

"There shall not be another soul but her and Chester."

"You must let me think about it," utters Dorothea.

Happening to glance at Cilla, she perceives that her sister is looking very eagerly at her, as though greatly interested in her decision.

"What do you think, Bel?" she says, glancing up in a pretty, appealing way at her husband.

"I shall think what you wish me to, my darling," he answers.

During the whole evening Lady Belhaven is in a state of perplexity. Some of her most fixed ideas are being shaken and upset. In the first place, she has been accustomed to a monopoly of the other sex; in her society, men have rarely had eyes or ears for anyone else, unless some particular syren of their own happened to be present. The fact of her having married Lord Belhaven can by no means be expected to interfere with her charm for other men. In these halcyon days for married women, (days of corresponding purgatory for husbands), beauties command more homage and admiration after they are appropriated than before.

But, at dinner, whilst she talks in her most fascinating manner to Duke, somewhat to the detriment of Belhaven's peace of mind, his eyes and attention wander frequently to the contemplation of his *vis-à-vis*. Lady Belhaven is a lovely woman;

there can be no two opinions on that score. Bel is a lucky fellow, but Duke knows so many beauties; has passed under the fire of so many fascinations, that he is proof against mere good looks.

Cilla, in her deep mourning, relieved only by white roses in her hair and at her breast, with her pale face and the strange fire of her lustrous eyes, exercises a sort of spell upon him. It is a pleasure, of which he is distinctly conscious, to meet the gaze of those eyes; her voice, innocent of the caressing modulations of the fashionable woman, has so much more sympathy in it, and, from some strange caprice (seeing that he has never valued the attribute of youth in a woman hitherto), he is fascinated by her childishness, and by the innocence and pure candour that are written unmistakably on her face.

This is the second stumbling-block to Dorothea. She has met Duke frequently in society, and though his manner to women has invariably been courteous and kind, he has never shown the smallest sign of being particularly attracted to any save the one with whom his name has been coupled these ten years. That Cilla, the ugly duckling, of whom she and her mother had despaired, should be able to rouse interest in the steeled breast of Duke Vereker when beauty after beauty has retired vanquished from the assault, is so extraordinary that Lady Belhaven is quite at a loss to understand it.

Duke must be one of those phenomenal men

who are not amenable to beauty like their fellows. Of course, now she comes to think of it, Mrs. Beauclerc is not a bit pretty. She is very clever. And Cilla is clever: fancy a man liking women for being clever! The idea is in itself so disgusting that her ladyship's lovely nose involuntarily "tiptilts," as though something unsavoury had been offered to it.

When the ladies leave them, Lord Belhaven and Duke draw up to the fire, light their cigarettes, and indulge in friendly chat. They have had a lengthy discussion on sporting topics, when Duke says suddenly and apparently *à propos* of nothing.

"How utterly unlike Lady Belhaven and her sister are! I could not have believed they were related."

Belhaven's usual keenness of discernment happens at this time to be blunted by his passion for his wife. He does not read his friend's thoughts, but imagines that his words imply disparagement of Cilla.

"Ah," he returns, affectionately championing her; "you must not judge of Cilla yet. She is a mere child, and of course my wife would make any other woman, not beautiful, look plain. But——"

"You don't understand me, old chap," interrupts Duke warmly, "if you fancy I meant to disparage Miss St. George. I think her simply charming, and you know I'm not a man who goes for beauty.

There's such a lot of it about now, and these pretty women are all the same. They've got their one little set of tricks, and, when you know them, it's always the same thing; but, now, with your sister-in-law, her face and eyes change every time you look at her. You can see she is not thinking about herself nor how she's looking, but about you and what you're saying."

Belhaven is a little surprised. He likes Duke immensely, but has never had much opinion of his mental calibre. This last speech of his exhibits a power of reflection and observation which he had not expected.

"Oh, then, you like Cilla," he says quietly. "I am glad of that. I can hardly tell how she would strike a stranger, being so used to her myself. She has a charming disposition. She is the most sympathetic creature I ever met; and she is just as clever as she can be. Upon my soul, considering her bringing up, I wonder she has turned out as she has."

"What about her bringing up?" asks Duke, deeply interested.

"Why, as far as I can make out," returns Belhaven, "she was left entirely to the mercy of a most infernal old devil of a governess, and her mother never looked after her at all. Poor soul! she's gone now, but I fancy she has a great deal to answer for on that child's account. She's all right now, because she's happy, but, if she comes to be oppressed, or

made wretched later in life; all the bad seeds of rebellion and opposition have been sown in her, and will come up stronger than ever. And I think I never knew a nature that had a more intense capacity for suffering than Cilla's."

"Poor little girl!" says Duke thoughtfully, and with a tender inflexion of voice that he is unaware of. "Let's hope she'll marry some good fellow who'll be awfully good to her, and won't give her any cause to be anything but happy."

"We won't think of a husband for her yet, at all events," rejoins Belhaven a trifle abruptly. "She is only sixteen and a half. With her physique, and her sensitive nature I think it would be downright wrong to let her marry for another four years."

"I don't know how you're going to prevent it," observes Duke, "unless you shut her up in convent. I suppose Lady Belhaven will present her next season, and she'll come out. Then, if a man comes along she fancies—take my word for it, Bel, there'll be lots who'll fancy her—how are you going to prevent her marrying?"

Belhaven gives a little, dissatisfied grunt. He has already discussed the subject with his wife, who has flouted his ideas and expressed her own with pretty firmness.

"Her education is not finished," he says.

"I'll be bound," retorts Duke, "that she has forgotten more than most girls know."

"I daresay," remarks Belhaven drily. "Most girls are as ignorant as carp. Cilla knows so much that it is a shame she should forget it. She speaks French and German perfectly; she sings and plays divinely; she is extremely well read, and—ah! I should like you to hear her recite——"

"Then, in the name of Heaven," interrupts Duke, "what more would you have her do?"

"I would have her keep up what she knows already. And," with a little satire which is lost on his hearer, "there is no danger of anyone knowing too much in our class of life."

"Let's go into the drawing-room, shall we?" says Duke.

CHAPTER VI.

Lady Belhaven was sitting in a low chair near the fire; her pretty little feet planted on a stool in front of her, animated, no doubt, by the benevolent desire of giving pleasure to others. She was toying with a feather-screen, and, when the men entered, directed an inviting little smile to Duke. Perhaps he did not observe or understand it; for he walked straight to where Cilla was reading by the light of a shaded lamp. The rose-colour which it reflected on her face was eminently becoming, and, as Duke approached, she lifted her large eyes to his face

with a look of pleasure and welcome. She liked him already; there was something so kindly, so frank and pleasant about him, and his bigness and strength, (attributes of all her heroes), inspired her with respect.

Belhaven drew a stool to his wife's side, and, believing himself unobserved, took her hand, but she withdrew it, smiling, and made a little gesture significant of the decorum to be observed in public. Belhaven, being in that semi-doting state, which, for a brief period, has been known to sap the senses of the most sensible and prudent men, expresses in a low, earnest voice, his contempt for the proprieties, and recovers his prisoner.

Dorothea yawns behind her fan, and that involuntary spasm of the face happening to produce a much more potent effect upon her lord than any considerations of discretion, he releases her at once, and sits staring into the fire, feeling in his heart an agony of disappointment quite unproportioned to the cause. But love-sick people are always irrational; their joys and sorrows are not to be measured nor even guessed at by ordinary folk: they are always plunging straight from Heaven to Hades, or from Hades back to Heaven.

"What is your book about?" says Duke, bringing a low chair to Cilla's side.

"It is a collection of old stories," she answers, "I have just finished one."

"Was it funny?" inquires Mr. Vereker.

"Oh, no!" and her tone is almost reproachful.

"I hate dismal stories," protests Duke, "just as I hate a miserable piece at the play. It gives me a horrid choking feeling in my throat, and then I get so angry that I want to knock some one down."

Cilla regards him pensively.

"I like a book or a play that makes me sad," she says, "because it is so pleasant to wake up and remember that it is not true, after all, and that one is not unhappy on one's own account."

"Unhappy!" cries Duke. "Why, a child like you ought not to know the meaning of the word unhappy!"

"Ah," says Cilla, "that is where people are so mistaken. They say childhood is a happy time. It is not!"—with strange vehemence, whilst her eyes flash—"it is a miserable, wretched, hateful time. I would not be a child again for anything you could offer me."

Duke has never felt so strong, so big, so protecting as he does in talking to this fragile creature, nor yet so weak morally. As he sits there, contemplating the small face, with its strangely expressive eyes, and the hands pressed together, he feels that he is a great blundering fellow, and is half afraid to speak lest he should trample, unwittingly, on the feelings of this sensitive creature.

"What a shame!" he says presently. "How could anyone be unkind to you!"

Cilla, with her imaginativeness, her acute conviction of her wrongs, has yet a strong sense of justice.

"I know a great deal of it was my own fault," she says. "I was tiresome, and disagreeable, and ill-tempered, and obstinate."

"I do not believe it," cries Duke loyally.

A smile lights up Cilla's face. This flattery, so genuinely spoken, is sweet to one to whom the taste of it is quite fresh: she possesses a very keen love of approbation.

"But I was," she insists. "I daresay Fräulein Steinman hated me just as much as I hated her, but then she could have gone away from me, and I could not get away from her. There is nothing so dreadful," very earnestly, "as being tied to some one you hate. That is why children are often miserable. A grown-up person can get away from anyone he does not like."

"Except a husband and wife," says Duke, and is immediately angry with himself for having said it.

Cilla has been kept entirely in the school-room. She has not had the advantage of being put *au courant* with the ways of society by hearing them discussed. Her novels and romances have almost invariably ended with the marriage ceremony, and a short paragraph implying that, *as* the lovers were

united, needs must they were happy ever after. So she looks up at him, and says,

"Ah, but then, they married because they loved each other, and I don't suppose they often want to get away, do they?"

"No," replies Duke hastily, "of course not. But about your story that you were reading."

"I will lend you the book, if you like," she says obligingly.

"No. I would rather have you tell me."

"I don't know whether you would care for it," she observes reflectively. "Are you at all—romantic?"

And then a little blush overspreads her face as she looks at Duke's stalwart from, and feels an unpleasant consciousness of having said something rather ridiculous.

Duke is not acute, but Cilla's eyes are such traitors to her thoughts that he guesses what is passing in her mind.

"I suppose you think a great hulking fellow like me has no business to have any soft feelings," he says. "But, you know, it doesn't always follow."

"No, no," cries Cilla hastily. "I am quite sure you are kind. But being romantic is different—many people think it very silly. Dorothea does" (with a glance at her sister, who is dozing in her chair, whilst Belhaven still stares moodily into the fire).

"And Bel?"

"Oh, he is romantic—quite romantic," Cilla

replies eagerly. "He and I think just alike about hundreds of things."

A sudden instinct flashes across Duke as he too gives a side-long glance at the other couple, that he and Dorothea are something of the same mental calibre, whilst Bel and Cilla are sympathetic. How strange that the opposites and not the similar natures generally come together.

"It seems we shall never get to the story," he says smiling, "and I am dying to hear it."

"I will tell it you, if you like," the girl says simply, "and if you find it stupid, stop me."

"I promise." And then Duke leans back in the chair, and watches her as she bends a little towards him, completely engrossed in her recital, with her beautiful eyes steadily fixed upon him, unconscious of embarrassment.

Cilla could not for the world keep her eyes away from the face of the person to whom she was talking, unless she were angry or offended with him, then she would find it equally impossible to look at the object of her displeasure.

"It happened a long time ago, and in a foreign country," she begins, speaking low, but in a voice very sweet, brimful of expression, and pathetic in the extreme when her tale becomes sorrowful. More than once, during the recital, it gives Duke that choking sensation in the throat which he had deprecated, but, upon this occasion, he feels no desire to

knock anyone down. On the contrary, he is strangely affected by a longing to gather the fragile form to his heart, and to kiss the quivering, sensitive mouth of the young story-teller.

"Once, in a distant land, there lived a maiden," proceeds Cilla. "She was an orphan, and very poor, and she gained her living by making and mending lace. One day, towards dusk, as she was returning from the environs of the city, where she had carried some work, a drunken man offered her rudeness. She tried to fly, but he held her fast. Suddenly she heard the sound of hoofs, and there came by two horsemen. She cried out, and the foremost one stopped, threw the bridle to his companion, and was beside her in a moment. He caught her assailant, and flung him into the ditch; then he turned to her as she stood trembling. She saw by his dress that he was a great lord, and it seemed to her that he had the most noble face she had ever seen. He stooped, and spoke kindly to her.

"'My poor girl,' he said, 'you are too fair to be out so late alone.'

"And, as he looked at her, his eyes pierced to her very soul, so that his image remained there for ever after. Then he gave her a piece of gold, and, bidding his servant remain behind to see that she got safely to the city, rode away, wishing her a courteous God-speed. From that day forth she wore the coin next her heart, and all her soul was filled

with the thought of the great lord, and, every hour, the desire to see him tormented her. So that, when there was a great fête or gala in the city, she would leave her work and go down amongst the crowd, hoping that he might pass, or, she would wait near the gates of his palace to see him ride forth, hiding herself that he might not be aware of her, and devouring his face with her eyes. Then she would return home, and think and dream of him and how he looked, and would say little prayers for him all day long as she made her lace. Once only he saw her, and smiled, and his smile seemed to change all the sad earth into Heaven. But evil days came upon her; the great people went away from the city to their country palaces, and with them went her lord also, and a fever struck her down and wasted her strength, so that she could no longer work, and had scarcely bread to eat. Still she kept the gold piece next her heart, having sewn it in a piece of linen lest some neighbour should see it, and take it from her when she slept, or lay senseless in the fever. Day and night she was tormented by the desire to look upon the face of her lord once more. 'If I might see him again and die,' was her prayer. When the hot months were passed, and the winter came, the great people returned to the city, but she could not rise from her poor bed to seek him. 'I shall die, and shall never see him more,' she wept to herself. One day the maid of the Court physician's

lady brought her some lace to mend, and found her lying wasted, and dying miserably on her straw bed. She told her lady, who was charitable to the poor, and the lady told her husband, and, the same day, he, because he, too, was tender-hearted, came to visit the dying girl in her garret. When he looked at her, he knew there was no more anything to be done for her, because Death had laid his finger upon her. But, because she was very young, and had been fair, he felt pity for her, and spoke gently to her, and asked if she had any wish before she died. 'If I could see him,' she said in a whisper, for all her strength was gone. 'If I could see him!' and she gazed piteously in the great physician's face, 'then I could die gladly.' He made her tell him the name of him she desired, and then he looked grave; for it was the name of one of the greatest lords in the city, and how could he bring such an one here?

"That night there was a ball given at the Court, and the physician was bidden. There, also, was the lord whom the dying girl had named, and a beautiful lady whom he loved. Then the physician, haunted by the memory of that wasted form, and those sad eyes, bethought him to tell the story to the lady who was beloved of the great lord. And when he told her, the tears came to her eyes, and she said pitifully, 'Poor child, it is but a small thing she asks. She shall have her desire.' Then she summoned the lord to her side, and told him of the dying girl, and

said, 'Go to her to-night for my sake; to-morrow she will be dead.' And he answered her, 'I will go for your sake, and for mine.'

"Then he and the physician went away together from the lights and music, the gold, the jewels, and all the pomp and grandeur which the Court held to the miserable garret where the dying girl lay, lighted by the feeble glimmer of a candle that a pitiful neighbour had set there. She lay without moving, and for a moment the physician thought her dead; then, feebly, her eyes unclosed. 'He is here,' he whispered, and a sudden light came to the dim eyes, and she looked up as though her soul had left its earthly frame, and had awoke in Heaven.

"But the noble, standing in the midst of this poverty and misery, was stricken to the heart to think that, whilst he lived in so much splendour, there should be human bodies perishing of want. He came towards her, and there were tears in his eyes.

"'Live, my poor girl!' he said gently, and he bent and took her hands in his. 'I charge myself with the care of you henceforth.'

"Then, as his words fell on her ear, her eyes lighted up for one moment, so that youth and beauty came back to her face.

"'My lord, my lord,' she murmured. 'It is enough.'

"With a great impulse of pity, he stooped and gathered her in his arms, and kissed her brow, and

when he would have gently put her back, she fell from his arms. She was dead, but she had known one moment of joy."

Cilla's eyes are full of tears, and her voice of passion. Duke sits looking at her, his mind absorbed with one thought—

"How that child could love!"

After a moment's silence, he makes a very characteristic remark.

"It is rather a dismal story," he says. "Let us hope it isn't true."

Cilla looks a little disappointed.

"Oh, but I think it is," she replies. "And I like sad stories. I like to think how faithfully she loved him, though he had only spoken those few words to her, and that she died happy because her dream was realised."

"But, now," says Duke, leaning a little towards her, "don't you think it would be pleasanter to think of a girl loving a man as much as that, and of his loving her back again, and, instead of her dying, of their marrying and being awfully happy."

"No," replies Cilla naïvely, "that would be common-place. Most stories end like that."

"Do they?" says Duke dubiously. But he does not think fit to impart any scepticism he may feel on the subject to his listener.

Dorothea's lovely head has fallen forward several times with a little jerk. At this moment it experi-

ences a big jerk, which rouses her thoroughly, and makes her feel a trifle provoked and aggressive. She opens her eyes wide, and beholds her lord moodily contemplating the fire, and Duke and Cilla in animated conversation by the table.

"Mr. Vereker," she says, in a half-piqued, half-jesting tone, "it is too bad of you to leave husband and wife to entertain each other. You see the result—we were both asleep."

At this Duke rises and comes towards her, and Belhaven stalks over to Cilla with an expression of face that she readily reads.

"Sing something, Cilla, will you?" he says.

"No, no," interposes Dorothea with pretty peremptoriness, (she never allows herself to look unamiable, but smiles even when displeased), "we will not have any music to-night. I am bored to death. I shall be asleep in five minutes, if some one does not amuse me. Let us play whist. Cilla dear, get the cards. Bel, please ring for the table. You don't mind, Mr. Vereker, do you?"

Duke does not care about cards. He was much happier talking to Cilla, but he is the best-natured man in the world, and acquiesces readily in his hostess' wish.

"We will not cut for the deal," Lady Belhaven says, as they seat themselves. "Husband and wife, of course, cannot play together!"

Belhaven looks distinctly sulky. Unfortunately,

he is aware of it, and ashamed of himself, but incapable either of changing the feeling or the expression of his face.

Cilla tries, in her sympathetic way, to soothe him, but Dorothea seems to take a malicious pleasure in ruffling him, though she assumes the sweetest, most innocent little air in the world in doing it.

"I am sure you have revoked, darling," she says once or twice, and insists on looking over the tricks; or, "Bel dear, why do you look so bored? Don't you want to play?"

Duke sees that Belhaven is put out, and wonders inwardly, as good-tempered, placid people are wont to do at others who show signs of sulkiness for no apparent cause. If Dorothea had been his wife, she would not have wasted her time in sticking little pins into him, because he would not have felt them, but Belhaven is dreadfully thin-skinned; passionately in love with her, and the hint, before others, that his company is not sufficient to amuse her, galls him beyond expression. He feels disgraced and slighted before Duke, who is perfectly unconscious of the cause of his vexation, and too much engrossed, besides, with Cilla to notice much what her sister is doing.

Cilla is paying the greatest attention to the game; throwing all the earnestness into it which she bestows on everything she does. Duke amuses himself by guessing her hand every deal by the expres-

sion of her face as she takes up her cards, which, indeed, it is by no means difficult to do. He enjoys her little glance of triumph when she trumps his best card or produces her ace; and has to be called to order once or twice by Dorothea for not attending to the game.

When Lady Belhaven is alone with her husband, she says suddenly, continuing her thoughts aloud,

"It really is very extraordinary about Duke."

"What is extraordinary?" inquires Belhaven, who has not quite recovered from his sulkiness.

"Don't you see how much taken he is with Cilla?"

"Why should he not be?"

If Dorothea were to give vent to her thoughts, she might say,

"Because, you ill-tempered idiot, I am beautiful, and Cilla is not. I am a woman of the world, and Cilla is a raw school-girl, therefore it behoves every man, who is in company with us both, to have no eyes or ears for her as long as I am present." But she replies,

"I should not have thought there was anything about Cilla, poor dear child, to attract a man like Duke."

"Duke does not care for pretty women," returns Belhaven, a trifle maliciously. "He was saying so to-night. 'They are all the same,' he says, 'when you once know their little set of tricks.'"

"That is a bore for the pretty women," returns Dorothea sweetly, "because he is so rich."

Belhaven is foolish enough to let her see that her pin has pricked him.

"Rich!" he echoes bitterly. "That is all *pretty* women care for. It doesn't matter whether a man has a heart of gold——"

"Not at all," agrees Dorothea, "if his purse is well filled with it. But, now, about Duke. Only fancy if he were to fall in love with Cilla!"

"It would not do at all," returns Belhaven abruptly. "If I thought there was any danger of it, I would not let her go over to the Court with us to-morrow."

Dorothea slowly lifts her beautiful white arms and clasps her hands behind her head, in which attitude she contemplates her lord. She says nothing, because it occurs to her that the Scriptures advise one against answering a fool according to his folly.

"I quite understand you," he says nettled, yet, at the same time, irritably conscious of her physical loveliness, "you have but one god. A man can have but one virtue in your eyes——"

"Indeed, dearest love," interposes Dorothea, who always adopts additional endearments when she is the farthest from feeling affectionate, "I should be very glad if he had two. Good temper is a great virtue."

Belhaven flings himself at her feet, and throws his arms round her.

"Oh, my darling," he cries with a sob in his throat, "why do you provoke me when I love you so awfully that every little word you say has power to wound me; when you know it drives me mad even to suspect that you did not marry me entirely for myself!"

When he has calmed down, he and Dorothea approach the subject of Duke and Cilla in a better temper. He gives her excellent reasons why, to think of marrying Cilla at all for the next two or three years, would be unwise for the girl's sake; he points out that, with so sensitive and sympathy-craving a nature, Duke would not be likely to satisfy her affections, and he tries to convince his wife that money would not afford that solace to Cilla's heart which it might do to the disappointed love of some women. Dorothea does not contradict him, though she is mentally pooh-poohing every word he says, and resolving that she will leave no stone unturned to secure so brilliant a marriage for her sister. What Belhaven may say or do counts for nothing. She is much more than a match for him. The real thought that troubles her, and recurs over and over again to her mind is,

"What will Mrs. Beauclerc say?"

CHAPTER VII.

THE Court is a very fine place indeed, and thoroughly well kept up, although its owner is a bachelor. Duke Vereker has a princely fortune, and delights in exercising hospitality. Every season he entertains hunting and shooting guests, and, for four months, keeps almost open house at the Court.

When Cilla arrived there, as a guest, with Lord and Lady Belhaven, she was at first struck almost speechless by the pomp and luxury that met her eyes; for Red Meade, which she had been wont to consider a palatial residence, is a very poor, humble place compared with the Court. Up to the present time, Cilla's knowledge of country houses has been only derived from books: the third room of a small London house, almost squalidly shabby, varied by furnished apartments at the seaside, having given her her only practical knowledge of dwelling-places. Now she felt as though some enchantment were at work, and some such accident had happened to her as followed the rubbing of a lamp, or pressing a ring in the "Arabian Nights" tales. So that when Lady Chester, waiting in some expectation to see the fascinating creature of whom she had heard so much in the last few hours from her brother, beheld her, she was considerably surprised and disappointed

to find a shy, silent young girl, with a rather awe-struck expression in her eyes, and hardly a word to say for herself. Her ladyship devoted herself at once to Lady Belhaven, who, as a beauty and a woman of the world, interested her, and, in contemplation of whom, she was at a loss to imagine how a man could bestow a second glance on Cilla.

Lord Belhaven had driven over early to shoot, and the sportsmen had not yet come in. Duke's collie was lying in front of the fire, and presently came and sat beside Cilla as she drank her tea, and, after watching her for a moment with an interested gaze, put his paw on her arm, and looked at the cake she held in a manner which did not admit of two interpretations. So he and Cilla ate their cake together, and, when it was all gone, she talked to him in a low voice, and caressed his head, and softly rubbed his ears in a manner which he seemed highly to appreciate. The girl was casting furtive glances around her and trying to realise that Duke, whose simple, hearty ways had made her feel so much at home with him, and, indeed, whom she had treated rather patronisingly than otherwise, was master and lord of all this magnificence. For Cilla had those vague ideas about great people and titled people that are indulged in, (and very properly), by simpler folk who do not live in their society, and who imagine them to be not only exalted in rank and riches, but equally so in mind, manners, ap-

pearance, and everything besides. If she had been called upon to picture a Duke or a Marquis, he would have appeared to her a very handsome, stately personage, and to find so great a being an ordinary-looking, perhaps ill-dressed and awkward mortal, would have shocked and pained her. True, Belhaven had not the appearance with which she endowed a lord, but she was so fond of him personally that she forgot to think what he was like. And he was essentially a gentleman in thought, feeling, and manner.

Suddenly the dog pricks up his ears, and makes a bound towards the door. A moment later, it is thrown open, and Duke's stalwart form comes in, followed by Belhaven and Sir John Chester. He greets his guests with the most evident pleasure, and, when he has said a word or two to Lady Belhaven, he establishes himself beside Cilla.

"I thought I should have been here in time to welcome you," he says, looking at her with eyes in which she can plainly read that he is glad to see her.

Cilla is not quite at her ease: she is trying to feel the awe and respect due to his position, and his hearty friendliness makes it difficult.

"We came very quickly," she answers. "It was cold, and the horses seemed to fly."

The dog, who has been paying great attention to his master, now comes to Cilla's side, and rests his head on her knee.

Duke is delighted.

"He has taken to you already," he cries, watching the girl's slim white fingers with pleasure as they pass to and fro over the silky, black coat.

"Dogs always come to me," she says.

And Duke returns with more heartiness than elegance—

"They're awful good judges, dogs are. You must see Jack. I'll send for him," and therewith he rings the bell for the terrier. "That's the gentleman who catches the rats," he adds slyly, "but we're not going to show you that performance, because it might set you against him, and I want you to like everything that belongs to me."

Jack arrives, is introduced, and behaves in a friendly manner to his master's young guest when he has recovered his exuberant delight at being reunited with Duke, and then Lady Chester suggests that Lady Belhaven and Miss St. George will like to see their rooms.

Dorothea is quite pleased that Duke should admire Cilla. She intends to encourage his fancy in every possible way, but she is not accustomed to sacrifice herself, and has the strongest objection to being left out in the cold. Mr. Vereker must perforce take her in to dinner, and she means to make him talk to her. The task is not a difficult one, because Sir John Chester completely monopolises the attention of Cilla, although she has Duke on

her other side. Sir John is a thoughtful man, and an earnest politician. When he was told that he would have to take Miss St. George in to dinner, his placidity was somewhat ruffled. What on earth could he talk about to a raw school-girl!

He was not a little surprised to find himself, mid-way through dinner, discoursing eloquently upon his favourite topics, incited thereto by the most intelligent eyes he has ever seen, and listened to with an interest which must have flattered any man. For Cilla had not only that keen sympathy which made her identify herself, for the time, with the ideas and feelings of her interlocutor, but she had the instinct of patriotism strongly developed, and was deeply interested to hear of anything which concerned her country. Therefore, whilst Sir John lectured and expounded, she listened intently, and had not a thought or look to spare for Duke, who contemplated her with a mixture of chagrin, surprise, and admiration.

"By Jove!" he says to himself, "she is a wonder. Fancy her rousing old Chester up like that!"

Seeing that he is "out of it," as he would say, with Cilla, he consoles himself by talking of her to her sister.

"Yes, she is a dear child, and immensely clever," responds Dorothea, who is in reality considerably bored by his encomiums.

"I suppose you will present her next season, won't you?" Duke asks eagerly.

"I hardly know," returns Lady Belhaven. "You see, we shall still be in mourning, and could not, of course, enter into much gaiety, but I want, if possible, to be presented myself on my marriage, and then I could present Cilla at the same time. But Bel rather objects to the idea."

"I don't see what difference it can make to him," says Duke.

"Poor dear Bel!" observes his wife with a pretty laugh. "He is full of theories. Theories are a bore, aren't they?"

"Horrid," responds Duke. "But you," looking earnestly at the lovely face beside him; "you can talk him out of them, can't you?"

Dorothea shakes her head dubiously.

"I thought a pretty woman could do anything with a man," he proceeds.

"Some men," says Dorothea maliciously, "don't care for pretty women," and she looks so pointedly at Duke that he feels extremely uncomfortable, remembering what he had said to Belhaven.

"Oh," he rejoins in rather a blundering manner; "every man, of course, must admire a pretty woman, if he isn't a fool; but what I said—that is, what I mean is that—particularly if one is not clever oneself, one likes it in a woman."

And he glances at Cilla in a manner which unmistakably points his meaning.

"Of course," agrees Dorothea sweetly.

"What has made Bel take up these absurd ideas about your sister?" Duke asks. "I expect he is a dog-in-the-manger, and don't want to lose her himself."

This speech is not a very happy one, as Lady Belhaven feels, but she lets it pass without apparent notice.

"He has made up his mind that poor Cilla is not to be married for the next three years at least," she says.

"What nonsense!" exclaims Duke. "There's one comfort, however; he is neither her parent nor guardian, so, if she chooses to marry, she won't have to ask his leave."

He speaks with such earnestness that anyone might imagine him to be personally interested in the question of Cilla's marriage.

"Just fancy now," he pursues, his eyes returning to a satisfied contemplation of Cilla—"just fancy her getting old Jack Chester to talk like that! He doesn't care for women—for anyone, at least, but my sister, and thinks it a bore to have to talk to them. But do you see how he's laying down the law? He looks as if he was on a platform, lecturing away to an enthusiastic audience."

Dorothea is a little surprised, certainly, at the way in which Cilla has come out. It is a mercy that she has something to distinguish her from the common-placeness of girls in general, although Lady

Belhaven is still of opinion that cleverness in a woman is only a *pis aller* for beauty.

"Yes," she says, but without much enthusiasm. "She and Bel often talk until my head aches, or I fall asleep."

Here Lady Chester catches her eye, and gives the signal for retiring. In the drawing-room Cilla relapses into shy silence. Dorothea and Lady Chester are talking about mutual acquaintances and social events, and seem to forget her very existence. She takes a book, and, ensconcing herself in a corner, soon becomes lost to everything around her, as her wont is when she reads. It is only Duke's tall figure towering over her that rouses her, and she gives a little start as her soul comes back from the regions of romance.

"How tremendously deep you were in that book!" he says, smiling benevolently and admiringly at her. "Now, do you know, if I were to begin to read after dinner, I should be asleep in three minutes."

"Should you?" says Cilla, gravely, opening her large eyes a little wider. "I cannot understand anyone going to sleep over a book."

"Ah! but you're so awfully clever, and I'm afraid I'm 'only a clod.' There was a book of that name once. I've forgotten what it was about though."

"Are you laughing at me?" asks Cilla, more gravely still.

"Do I look like it?" says Duke, regarding her with a very earnest expression, and she is satisfied that he is not.

"I want to hear you sing," he continues. "Come to the piano, will you?"

"Oh! please don't ask me," cries the girl, and she begins to tremble at the very thought.

"Why, you surely don't mind any of us?" he rejoins, with an accent on the us that implies a very mean opinion of both himself and the rest of the company.

"I never sing before anyone," Cilla answers.

"Oh! but you must! Do! Now won't you, just to please me?"

Cilla is rent in twain. She always wants to please, especially anyone who is kind to her, but she is agonizingly shy of playing and singing before strangers. Once or twice when she has made the attempt, she remembers the most shameful failures.

"Do!" intreats Duke again, and she rises despairingly and goes with him to the piano.

She sits down trembling in every limb; her hands can scarcely feel the notes; she is very white; her lips quiver, and Duke, as he watches her, surprised and pitiful, wishes a thousand times that he had not asked her.

Cilla plays a lame symphony, with several wrong notes, which jar horribly on her sensitive ear, and

make her ten times more nervous. Then she begins her song.

It is painful to listen to her, and in the middle of the first verse her memory goes, and she breaks down lamentably. The tears are positively starting to her eyes; Duke feels an extravagant desire to stroke her small sleek head; to soothe and console her as one would a child. At this moment Lord Belhaven comes up.

"Why, Cilla," he says, putting a kind hand on the girl's shoulder, a familiarity which Duke inwardly resents; "what is the matter? Where is your voice gone?"

"I am so sorry," she murmurs, humbly, feeling terribly ashamed of herself.

"Don't try any more to-night," rejoins her brother-in-law, and she rises from the piano, feeling quite disgraced and miserable.

"I'm going to show you my photographs," says Duke, and he fetches two big volumes, and brings them to the sofa and seats himself beside her. She forgets her humiliation as she looks at the pictures of foreign countries he has visited; birds and beasts that he has shot; his horses, his dogs, his cats, his yacht.

"Oh!" cries Cilla, as she comes to a photograph of a splendid schooner, "is that yours?"

"Yes," he answers. Then, eagerly, "Do you like yachting?"

"More than anything in the world," she says, with kindling eyes.

"I'm awfully glad of that," exclaims Duke, and at that moment he sees his ship with "youth at the helm and pleasure at the prow," both of which allegorical figures are represented in his mind by Cilla. "I can give you some of the best of what you like best in the world."

Every moment that Duke sits beside her, every fresh look that he takes into her clear eyes, increases her magnetic influence over him—it is such a strange feeling that she gives him, a sensation of such blended strength and weakness—physical strength as he looks tenderly at her youth, her fragile form; and mental weakness as he hears her bright, intelligent remarks, and notes the deep, thoughtful expression of her eyes. He wants to touch her; he would give a fabulous sum to put his arm round her as she sits beside him, and yet the instinct which prompts the desire is as different from the instinct which has impelled him to the same action with other women as light from darkness—it is as perfectly pure as mortal feeling can be—it is the attraction of protective power to soft feminine weakness.

It pleases and amuses Duke to see the little flower-like hand lying beside his big brown one on the open book; once he encloses it smiling in his, saying,

"What a little mite of a hand! It is lost in mine," and Cilla smiles back at him unembarrassed, because there is nothing but pure kindness and tenderness in his touch.

Both of them are surprised when Lady Chester, rising, suggests that it is time to retire.

Duke does himself the pleasure of putting Cilla's candlestick into her hand.

"We will go and have a look at the cats to-morrow," he says, as he bids her good night, and stands for a moment to watch her slim figure up the broad staircase. Then, with a hasty stride, he pursues his sister's retreating form down the gallery.

"Good night, Georgie," he utters, stooping to kiss her; then, with some eagerness, "What do you think of her? Isn't she charming?"

Lady Chester hesitates, whilst a faint, deprecating look overshadows her face. She is a kind, amiable woman, fond of her brother and desirous of pleasing him. But she has not discovered anything at all remarkable about Cilla, and is at a loss to account for his extraordinary infatuation.

Duke's face falls.

"You don't care about her," he says.

"She is so young, and seems so very shy," answers Lady Chester. "Perhaps when I see more of her——"

"Yes," returns Duke hastily, "when you talk to

her, you'll think quite differently. Good night again, Georgie."

"Ah!" he says to himself, as he goes slowly towards the smoking-room, "Angie would have found it out before this. Angie, will understand her!" and then a sudden thought smites him, and makes him stand quite still for a moment, and ask himself, "Will Angie understand her? What will she say to her at all? Angie who has never had a rival yet in his heart. A rival, pshaw! what he feels towards this little girl is something quite different; it is——" but Duke fails exactly to analyse what his sentiment for Cilla is.

After breakfast next morning, the promised visit is paid to the stables. Cilla is shown the horses, the dogs, the cats, and is enchanted. If she liked Duke before, she loses her heart to him when she sees how good he is to animals, and how fond they are of him. The dogs fawn with frantic joy upon him, the horses neigh as he approaches them, the cats come and rub against his legs, and he has a kind word for them all. Cilla is a little timid naturally, but Duke is so strong; she feels such a complete sense of protection in his company that she walks up to the horses' heads and pats their sleek necks without the faintest trepidation. With dogs she is quite at home, and caresses them and the cats by turn. She is astonished and delighted at the harmony in which they all live—sometimes a

cat will pretend to put her back up as a dog rushes by, but it is evidently mere pretence. Jack is at his master's heels.

"Isn't it rum?" says Duke, turning to Cilla. "Jack knows all our own cats, and is perfect friends with them; he goes to sleep with his head on one or two of them sometimes; but if a strange cat comes along, he goes perfectly mad, and it has to be pretty quick to get away from him."

Just as the animals welcome their master by blandishments and endearments, so every man in the yard turns a smiling face and shows keen alacrity when Duke speaks to him. Cilla returns to the house enchanted. Duke is becoming a sort of hero to her; not of the sentimental order, but of the grand old Viking type.

The men are going to shoot again to-day. Lady Belhaven and her sister are to leave the Court at noon. Guests are expected, some of whom will arrive by an early train, and, in her deep mourning, Dorothea does not wish to encounter strangers.

Adieux have been made, the men are off for their day, Lady Chester and Dorothea are chatting in the morning-room, and Cilla has wandered into the drawing-room, and seated herself at the magnificent grand piano which stands near one of the windows. She sings away to herself with the keenest pleasure, revelling in the sound of her own voice, which in this fine room sounds better than it has

ever done before. It is rarely sweet and pathetic—as she sings, tears of deep feeling come to her eyes.

"Why cannot I sing like that before people?" she says to herself, with a sense of mortification. "Why should I have disgraced myself so last night when, after all, I can sing?"

The door which was just ajar is pushed suddenly open, and Duke comes in. His face is beaming with smiles.

"I knew it! I knew it!" he cries, in an exultant tone. "By George! what a wonder you are!"

Cilla has risen startled and bewildered.

"You didn't know I was there," he continues. "Just as I crossed the bottom of the first garden, I saw you opening the piano, and I made an excuse to the rest and sent them on, and slipped back myself. And I've been outside the door twenty minutes, and heard all your songs."

He stands over her with a delighted look in his face, as if some sudden piece of good fortune had befallen him.

"I say" (possessed with a devouring desire to give her something or do something for her, which attacks him when he likes a woman), "I wish you would let me give you a dog. You are so fond of them, and you have no pet—it seems such a shame."

"Oh! I *should* like one!" answers Cilla eagerly. "That is if Dorothea would not mind."

"I'll square Lady Belhaven," returns Duke confidently. "Would you like a pug? I know of the handsomest in London."

"Above all things," says the girl, with kindling eyes.

"It's the greatest mistake in the world to say pugs are stupid," pursues Duke. "They're the most intelligent, faithful creatures in the world. I'll send for this pug, and bring him over myself to Red Meade." Then, coming a little closer, taking her hand, and looking at her with quite a new expression in his eyes, he says, "I hope you'll be a little bit glad to see me when I come."

And Cilla, who is as sensitive as an Eolian harp, trembles and feels half frightened, half repelled, as modest young girls unconsciously do at the first symptom of passion in a man. He sees in a moment the effect he has produced on her, and checking himself, says, in his old hearty tone,

"Good-bye. I won't forget about the dog." And then he goes.

As he strides along to join the shooters he has arrived a step nearer to comprehending his feeling for Cilla. He would like to have her here always, there is almost a sense of pain in the remembrance that he will not look into her beautiful eyes nor touch her little hand again for days to come. And then the thought of last night smites him again sharply.

"What will Angie say?"

CHAPTER VIII.

It is nearly ten years since Marmaduke Vereker made the acquaintance of Angie Beauclerc. He was a fine looking, wild young fellow then, of about two and twenty, not long come into his property, with splendid health and spirits, and everything else that can make life pleasant. But on that particular day he was not in very good form, as he would have expressed it—he was in a dilemma; he had made rather a fool of himself the night before.

The fact was that a little burlesque actress of considerable fascinations in her own particular line, who had worn his diamonds, sat behind his horses, and made liberal use of his ever ready purse, had extracted from him more than half a promise to make her Mrs. Vereker. Why not? He quoted to himself a dozen good fellows who had taken their brides from even less select circles, and the marriages had turned out all right—quite as well, at all events, as some of those which society had blessed and approved. And it was sickening the way mothers and chaperons set upon fellows with money; anyhow, he would be rid of their persecutions. He had used many specious arguments to persuade himself that he had really not been such a fool, after all; but he had not quite succeeded in con-

vincing himself. To-night would clinch it—he was going to dine with his semi-betrothed at Richmond.

Is there such a thing as chance? Duke was turning out of Piccadilly when he ran up against a married brother officer. Duke held a commission in the Household Cavalry.

"Come and have some lunch, Duke! We've got one or two pleasant people coming," said his friend.

It was Sunday, and Duke had nothing to do for the next four hours.

"I shall be delighted," he answered, and the two men walked back to Park Street together. At lunch Duke sat next to Mrs. Beauclerc. As far as he knew, he had never set eyes on her until that day; before he left the house, he felt as if he had known her all his life. She was not beautiful—no, not in the very least; but there was some extraordinary charm about her—quite a different sort of charm from that of Miss Lilian Vavasour. He talked to her eagerly—his conversational powers were not, as a rule, extraordinary; but he felt he could have gone on talking to her for ever. When the ladies left the table and the men lit their cigars, he went over and sat by Mrs. Beauclerc's husband, who seemed a very cheery, nice sort of fellow; they began to talk about horses, and were friends directly. And, as soon as they went up to the drawing-room,

Duke found his way again to Mrs. Beauclerc's side. He sat talking to her until she rose to go; the other guests had all departed.

"Let's make up a party to go to the play!" said the pretty hostess, seeing how much Mr. Vereker was attracted, and always ready to be good-natured, as she understood good nature. "Angie, you must come. Mr. Vereker, will you make one?"

Duke gave an eager assent.

Curiously enough they were all disengaged for the next night.

"You must all come and dine here first," said their hostess.

"Won't you come to me instead?" cried Duke. "I can give you an awfully nice little dinner at my rooms. Do come and try bachelor fare!" and he looked first at his friend's wife, then at Mrs. Beauclerc, then at the two husbands.

Everyone was agreeable; the ladies vowed it would be delightful. The hour was settled; the theatre fixed upon—it was not the one at which Miss Vavasour performed.

Mr. and Mrs. Beauclerc and Duke took leave together; he was going their way, he said, might he walk with them? and accordingly, he did, every step of the way to their tiny house close to Belgrave Square. Arrived there, he accepted Captain Beauclerc's invitation to come in and look at the inside of their nutshell, and he stayed on, and had a

brandy and soda, whilst Mrs. Beauclerc drank her tea. The clock struck half-past five; he had only half an hour to get back to his rooms, change, and drive his phaeton to Miss Vavasour's residence in South Belgravia. He must tear himself away.

"To-morrow at seven, then," he said, looking eagerly in Angie's face—"seven sharp. You *will* come. You *won't* throw me over!" (imploringly).

"But I want to come. I am most anxious," she answered smiling, and with the voice that made her greatest charm. Then he told her his number in Piccadilly twice over, and repeated seven *sharp*.

As his hansom rattled over the stones in Piccadilly (it was not paved with wood in those days), he utterly pooh-poohed to himself the idea that he had ever seriously thought of marrying Lilian Vavasour. What! cut himself off for ever from the society of ladies, and associate henceforth with common, uneducated women, of vulgar, boisterous manners. Heavens! what glamour had been cast over him that had caused him to look with pleasure and interest upon such a creature! and at that moment refinement, culture, delicacy, seemed to him the only desirable things in a woman.

If Duke had spent a charming afternoon in society which he had just learned to appreciate, he was doomed to pass a very different evening, To begin with, he was late in calling for Miss Vavasour, who, as a matter of fact, had been expecting him

all the afternoon, and was exceedingly anxious to have her engagement sealed and settled. The moment she saw him she knew that something was wrong—instinct told her that her chances of becoming Mrs. Vereker had dwindled almost to nothing. She tried to conceal her anger, and to rally him, but her chaff set his teeth on edge; her voice, words, demeanour, appearance, everything displeased him. It even occurred to him that it was rather low form to be seen driving a burlesque dancer in his phaeton, and yet, six hours before, he had seriously contemplated the idea of having her beside him for the remainder of the term of his natural life. When he saw her manner of eating at dinner, and observed her stuff her roll into her mouth as if she had been sucking an orange, he thought of Mrs. Beauclerc, who ate with peculiar grace and refinement, and shuddered.

Miss Vavasour tried to bring her lover to reason by flirting desperately with another man, but so far from resenting her behaviour, he was infinitely relieved by it. She drank much champagne, her voice became louder, her repartees more pointed; her cheeks flushed redder through her paint; her bonnet got a little awry. Whilst her right hand neighbour encouraged and egged her on to the utmost of his ability, Duke became colder, more disgusted every moment—the glare, the noise, the loud laughter, the painted faces revolted him—he thought

of a cool, tasteful little drawing-room, and saw a graceful woman leaning back in her low chair, smiling up at him, sipping her tea daintily; speaking in a soft, well-bred voice.

A little while ago he had thought it rather fine to protest that the society of ladies bored him. But to-night!

Well, twenty-four hours would go somehow, he supposed, and then, he should be sitting next that lady he was thinking of; hearing her voice—he would be in his proper place—the stalls, and the actresses would be in theirs—on the stage.

Miss Vavasour, conscious of the failure of her manœuvre, insisted, after dinner, on Duke's taking her into the garden. And there she made him a very pretty scene; reproached, screamed, abused, swore, threatened, and put the final seal on his resolve to sacrifice half of all he possessed rather than make her Mrs. Vereker. He escaped from her at last, and sought the man to whom she had turned her attentions at dinner.

"For heaven's sake, George, go home with that woman! I cannot stand any more of her! Take my phaeton. I will go by train, or a fly, or get a lift from some one."

And, nothing loth, his friend accepted the office, and Duke paid the bill and escaped before Miss Vavasour was aware of his intention.

It was fortunate for Mr. Vereker that the lady

had no writing to show nor any witnesses to bring in confirmation of her statement that he had made her a promise of marriage, so after a great deal of trouble, annoyance, persecution, many threats, etc., Miss Vavasour consented to relinquish her claims on receipt of so extravagant a sum of money that I should be afraid to mention it. But Duke's fortune would have stood a good many assaults, and he spent money like water.

He gave a princely dinner to his guests next night—such an entertainment, in fact, that it was nearly nine o'clock before they thought about the theatre. The two ladies were charmed at the perfect taste in which everything was done, and the pains that had been taken to please them. But, truth to tell, Duke was not imaginative, though he had the best will in the world; he had told his French servant to arrange everything with a view to please ladies, *real ladies*, and Eugène had excellent taste; knew that *femmes du monde* liked what was delicate, refined, *recherché*, beautiful flowers, a table arranged with taste, whereas the greatest attraction that could be offered to women of another world was lavishness, profusion, however coarse, evidences that much money had been expended in the entertainment.

Duke recognised at once the fitness of the banquet for the guests whom he had invited, and Eugène was not only complimented later, but received

still more gratifying testimony of his master's approval.

From that time forth, the Beauclercs became Duke's dearest friends; he could hardly exist without them; their house saw more of him than his own. In due course the world began to look askance at Mrs. Beauclerc; to say very spiteful, disagreeable things about her. When mothers and chaperons saw that well-looking and immensely rich young Life Guardsman always about with the same lady, they decided that she was not a fit person to know; they formed a league, and determined to crush her. They tried their very best, but they failed. You see Captain Beauclerc was devoted to Duke, and could not have too much of his company; voted him the best fellow living, and made him free of his house. Was that husband a fool or a knave? the world asked itself. It determined to put him to the test. It wrote him anonymous letters, showing him certain deductions that were as plain as pike staves; but with the generosity, the chivalry of feeling that becomes a man, Algy Beauclerc put the communications at the back of the fire, and did not even think of mentioning them to his wife.

Meantime, Captain and Mrs. Beauclerc went yachting with Duke in his beautiful schooner; spent a couple of months at his Highland shooting-box, and helped entertain his winter parties at his splendid seat in Blankshire. Very shortly after making their

acquaintance, he left the service and became his own master. The Beauclercs were not very well off; before they knew Duke they had been compelled to forego many pleasant parties and many gaieties upon economic principles. But now, whether it was Ascot, Goodwood, Hurlingham, the opera, Mrs. Beauclerc always saw and did everything in the best possible manner, and Captain Beauclerc had equal advantages; he was invariably of the party. One thing aggravated the world prodigiously—it was that Lady Chester, Duke's sister, and an important member of society, should be friendly with Mrs. Beauclerc and resolutely refuse to see any harm in her brother's devotion to that lady. Lady Chester was a large, fair, placid lady, some five years older than Duke, and quite a *grande dame*. It was so kind of Mrs. Beauclerc to look after him, she said: that was just the sort of friend who was invaluable to a young man—kept him out of so much mischief—really she never saw anyone so improved as Duke since Mrs. Beauclerc took him in hand. Of course the world saw through Lady Chester and sneered. She was a model of matronly propriety, and she and her husband were devoted to each other—it could say nothing on that score. But Lady Chester had children, and would not they inherit all the Vereker property in case of Duke dying without legitimate issue? His father and grandfather had cut off the entail. Since then the value of the pro-

perty had increased amazingly—coal had been found upon it. Lady Chester and her children would naturally be Duke's heirs, if he had none of his own. So, of course, said the world, it was easy enough to see why Lady Chester connived at her brother's entanglement with a married woman—she hoped to keep him from marrying.

When, presently, the world found that Angie Beauclerc held her head higher than ever; that Mr. Vereker gave the most charming, *recherché* entertainments; that his yacht and house were the very pleasantest in the world to stay in, and that, somehow, people were only invited who were civil and friendly to Mrs. Beauclerc, it turned round and swore she was a very clever, charming woman; that there was not a shadow of harm in her intimacy with Mr. Vereker; that it was only natural that, not being very brilliant himself, and so very easy-going, he was glad to have some one to arrange things for him. Was it likely, the world said now, that if there were anything wrong, a woman like Lady Chester—such a nice, manly fellow as Algy Beauclerc—would countenance and connive at it?

One cannot always go by what the world says. The world will sometimes say a man is a woman's lover if she drives two days running on the box-seat of his coach, or sits out three or four dances with him at a ball, and the same world, if it suits its convenience, will see a woman sit on a man's

knee, with her arms round his neck, and swear it is a case of purely platonic affection.

Many women envied Angie bitterly—they watched her like lynxes—they were always on the alert to catch her tripping. They intercepted many a look of poor Duke's at her, but she never changed—her behaviour was always precisely the same to him—kind, friendly, perhaps a shade protecting and maternal. She never exhibited the slightest authority over him; never gave him commands, nor treated him as though he were her property, as women will sometimes do to a man over whom they have ever so little influence. It was he who was always trying to find out what she wished; what would please her; and doing it. What on earth was her attraction for him? women asked each other frantically. She was not a bit pretty—pretty! why, she had not a decent feature in her face, except perhaps her eyes. Then they came to the conclusion at which the sex invariably arrives when a woman is beloved and yet not handsome—*she must be very bad.* That always consoles them. It is a mysterious phrase — it implies an enormous deal, and yet they do not quite know what they imply, or even what they wish to imply. But, unfortunately, there was no evidence of Angie being very bad. She was perfectly ladylike, her manners were particularly well-bred. She did not affect a loose style of conversation, nor permit men to talk before her in a manner that

suggested a want of respect. How did she catch Duke, and how did she keep him? Keep him she certainly did; for years rolled by and found him occupying precisely the same place in the Beauclerc *ménage*, and, if anything, Angie's sway over him and all that belonged to him was greater than ever. Mothers and chaperons gave him up; they had tried to do battle against Mrs. Beauclerc, and had failed; in Duke's own house they had made cabals; had set upon her and tried to drive her out, but it was they who had to retire with loss from the combat. Angie always came up smiling.

"How she fleeces him!" the world said, when it saw in what sumptuous style Mrs. Beauclerc saw everything that was to be seen; when it saw her driving in a Victoria with a magnificent chestnut horse; when it ate the perfectly appointed dinners that she gave, and looked at the wealth of flowers and the costly nick-nacks that decorated her rooms. But the world never made a greater mistake. Duke, like all generous-minded men who care for a woman, would have heaped gifts upon her; would have given her his head, as the saying runs, but she would not take his gifts, or only such as she considered it proper and prudent for a woman to receive, and he had to puzzle his brains for excuses and pretexts delicate enough to confer even these. To accept his hospitality was, of course, nothing—to live on his yacht; in his houses; to go to race-

meetings with him; to occupy boxes at the opera or the theatre of his providing; to receive his hampers of game, of fruit, of flowers. The Victoria, the brougham, the horse were his, it is true; but he had any number of horses and carriages, and he had offered the use of one to Captain Beauclerc for his wife. That was simple enough; they were such friends, and since Fortune had favoured him more than them, they would surely not be too proud to accept a trifling service at his hands. And was he not overwhelmed with obligations to them? did he not lunch and dine for ever in their house? He sent Algy choice wines and boxes of the finest cigars by the dozen—a stranger entering the house would have been puzzled to know whether he was a greater friend of the husband or the wife. He adored their boy—a bright, pretty little fellow—no child ever had so many or such costly toys; it was a mercy that he was a year old when Duke first made acquaintance with the Beauclercs, or Heaven knows what the world would have had to say on the subject. Angie was wrapt up in that boy of hers—indeed, Duke owed a great measure of the regard she had for him, to the boy. When he was four years old, he caught small-pox, and lay at the point of death, and his mother was in an agony of despair. The moment that Captain Beauclerc heard the nature of the disease, he fled the house and London, saying that it was not worth while for both him and Angie

to catch it—besides, if she fell ill, there would be no one to nurse her. So he betook himself to the sea-side in a dreadful fright lest he should already have caught the infection, smoked all day long and two-thirds of the night, and corresponded with his wife only by telegram, thinking that the safest method.

Duke's behaviour was very different. It was with the utmost difficulty that Angie kept him out of the house—twice, in spite of the servants, he had rushed upstairs into the little sick child's room, and it was only by Mrs. Beauclerc showing real anger that she at last got him out of the room and house. After that she would not let the door be opened to his summons, but only spoke to him through the window, in spite of his abject entreaties. He came three or four times a day to inquire, and bribed her maid to come to the area-railings, where he would detain her with a thousand inquiries and messages. And on that day—that awful day—when the poor, heart-broken mother never quitted her darling's couch, expecting that every hour would be his last, Duke was so overcome by the report the girl brought him, that she thought, as she said afterwards, "he'd have dropped where he stood," and could not do otherwise than ask him down into the kitchen. And there he sat, on one of the deal chairs, for an hour, with his arms on the kitchen table, and his head bowed over them; his big frame heaving with great sighs and groans.

Poor Duke! he was as affectionate as a child or a dog—his heart was as big as his body. The cook went quietly about preparing the servants' dinner (folks must eat, even when there's death in the house): and casting sympathising glances from time to time at the poor young gentleman; the footman brought a brandy and soda and put by his elbow, but he was beyond brandies and sodas to-day—the maid had gone back to the door of the sick-room, which, however, she was not allowed to enter. Angie recked nothing of losing what portion of beauty she might have herself in this awful hour, but she would not consent to let her servants run any risk. She and the hospital nurse attended entirely to the sick child.

The cook was preparing an Irish stew, and very savoury it smelt; but after that day Duke could never bear the sight or smell of it: it brought back to him that terrible morning when he sat with his arms on the kitchen table, and his heart full of anguish, thinking that, with all his wealth and goodwill, he was impotent to help those whom he loved best, or to offer them the smallest meed of comfort.

Contrary to expectation, little Algy recovered. Then Duke, not even asking leave, took a small house by the sea-side, and thither, without much demur, Angie was persuaded to take the boy as soon as he was well enough. Out of that house Duke was not to be kept by any commands, how-

ever imperative, and there he made himself the child's slave and plaything; spoiled the knees of all his trousers by crawling about the floor, the position in which it most amused Master Algy to see him; became in turn every wild and tame beast in the zoological alphabet; accompanied him when he went abroad in his Bath chair.

It was not a very crowded watering-place that he had selected, and Duke's big form, with the inevitable cigar, in attendance upon the little convalescent, soon got to be well known. It was quite pretty to watch him, all the women said. Such a devoted father never was seen. But one day a town mouse arrived and enlightened the sea-side mice.

"Oh!" he said, with a cunning smile, "that is not the father—that is the rich Mr. Vereker. He is no relation at all—he is the friend of Mrs. Beauclerc."

"Oh!" said the sea-side mice, exchanging glances, and drawing down the corners of their mouths. After that they looked at Duke with increased interest.

CHAPTER IX.

THE years rolled on, and Mrs. Beauclerc, if not a leader of society, was a highly esteemed member of it. The world's tongue had made the funeral-pyre of her reputation, but she had risen proudly from the ashes like a phœnix, and soared boldly into the empyrean of fashion.

Her heart had been disappointed: she turned for consolation to the world, gauging exactly the value to be extracted from it, and quite content with what it gave. People who once looked more than askance at her, and who had done their best to ostracise her, would have been very glad to rank amongst her friends, even her acquaintances now. No one gave such charming little parties—the best men, the prettiest women, were to be met at her house, and Mr. Vereker's entertainments were celebrated. At the luncheons and dinners which he gave in Park Lane, if Lady Chester was not there to preside, Captain Beauclerc always took the head of the table; no particular place being assigned to Angie, though she frequently sat next her host. Duke was never quite happy unless she was beside him—he could not find much to say to any other woman.

Mrs. Beauclerc had become very fastidious about the people she knew, and quietly declined the acquaintance of many who were anxious to know her. She was never rude—she never cut an old friend; but she had a little cold, civil manner to people she did not choose to cultivate, that made her as inaccessible as an iceberg. These people raged furiously against her, and declared that she gave herself the most abominable and unjustifiable airs, but that was hardly true.

"Why should I know people whom I do not care about, and who bore me?" she argued. "How can it be unkind on my part to decline their acquaintance? It is not as if I were a great person—I am no one," said Angie, modestly. "They only want to know me to suit their convenience, and not from any love for me—they want to be amused. What is their money or their rank to me if they are dull and stupid? I do not wish to go to their heavy parties, and I am certainly not going to spoil mine by inviting them."

So she smiled at them with cold courtesy; returned their calls by leaving cards, after a somewhat long interval; declined their invitations, and forebore to invite them in exchange. She never risked a rebuff by seeking an acquaintance, but waited until the advance was made to her—then she received it with graceful cordiality. She detested pushing people.

"If the only way to gain admittance to good houses were by being intrusive and forward, I should remain for ever outside them," she said.

It was not only, however, for the sake of Mr. Vereker's parties that everyone wished to know Angie—she was clever, witty, amusing to her fingers' ends: "the best company in the world," many a man beside Duke swore. She would take equal pains to please members of her own sex if she liked them. She did not, surprising to relate, hate every other woman, and was a warm and sympathetic admirer of beauty, youth, and grace. There never was such a charming chaperon, every girl agreed for whom she had consented to act in that capacity.

Mrs. Beauclerc rather affected the society of women, especially pretty women, and so far from keeping them out of Duke's way, and seeming anxious to monopolise him, she gave them every opportunity of meeting him, and of making the conquest of him if they could. A keen observer might have remarked that all her women friends were of the same stamp; pretty women without very much in them. She never chose a clever one for a companion, nor cared to pursue an acquaintance with one. Now Duke, oddly enough, adored wit and talent, and found but little attraction in a woman who was *only* pretty. Angie sometimes urged him to marry: she would point him out such and

such girls eminently fitted to be Mrs. Vereker, and invite them to meet him, but Duke invariably shook his head, and said,

"I shall never marry. If I did, that is the last woman in the world I should choose. There is nothing in her; two stupid ones together would be a very bad look out for the next generation. And why are you in such a hurry to get me married?"

What *was* there between Duke and Mrs. Beauclerc? Society had asked itself that question until it was hoarse. No one ever doubted what his feelings for her were. Poor Duke! with his honest, blundering, straightforward ways, could never keep his own counsel, and his face betrayed him every hour of the day. Only his face, though, for he never talked of Angie to any one. He was the best-natured fellow in the world, but once or twice, when men had tried to draw him on the subject, they had concluded not to repeat the experiment. It was Angie who was the sphinx—the mystery. No one had ever seen any indication on her part of anything more than friendliness for Duke; her manner to him was always the same—kind, pleasant, a shade maternal. But still her influence over him was unbounded, and the world refused to believe that any woman could gain such power over a man by strictly fair and honest means.

When Duke took that charming house of his in Park Lane, it was Angie who furnished it from top

to bottom, and made it the elegant, luxurious, tasteful place that it was. It gave her the most agreeable occupation; she loved exercising her taste and ordering all these rich, costly things. Whatever she suggested, chose, ordered, was right in Duke's eyes, but she always insisted upon consulting him and having his opinion, and then she made him give the order. She took nothing upon herself. And, with great tact and wisdom, she never interfered with his servants or dependents at his various places. Perhaps her quick eyes detected that he was robbed and pillaged, but she considered that the inevitable fate of the rich. Besides, it could not injure a fortune like his, and she knew him well enough to be quite sure that he would rather be robbed a thousand times than be compelled to detect and punish anyone for doing it. Mrs. Beauclerc, therefore, was always a popular and welcome guest in Mr. Vereker's houses or on board his yacht —she was "a lady who knew her place."

When the house in Park Lane was furnished, it had to be ornamented. Angie had the true woman's love of china and nick-nacks. Some curious clocks and bits of china were brought from his country place, and after that, she used to take him to Christie's from time to time to add to the stock. Duke obediently bought what she advised, though he did not know Staffordshire from Chelsea, or Sèvres from Oriental. He thought it rather a waste

of money: if it had only been diamonds for Angie, he would have been too delighted, but he never hinted that her purchases were, in his opinion, poor value for the outlay. Sometimes, when Mrs. Beauclerc had bought a piece that she particularly fancied, he would declare after it came home that he did not like it, and would insist upon her finding room for it in her own house. This, however, was only a pretext for making her a present of it.

"Very well," she would say, smiling. "I will take care of it until you marry. I daresay Mrs. Vereker will like it."

In this way a great many *objets d'art* came into Mrs. Beauclerc's house and embellished it.

Duke, we know, had a most generous disposition; it was one of his greatest trials that he, being rich, could not give money to the woman whom he loved, and who was poor. Angie would neither accept money nor jewels from him—he dared not even offer them. The only means he had of contributing to her slender income was by winning money for her on the turf, and she was not to be taken in by plausible trickery. If she won, it had to be fairly proved to her; if she lost, she insisted on paying, and Duke, who liked racing for itself, but was no gambler, was at the greatest pains to get good tips on her account, and now and then astonished people

by the intense delight he evinced at winning fifty or a hundred pounds.

"That is always the way," said those who could not read between the lines. "Your rich people are ten times keener about winning their money than poor ones."

With Captain Beauclerc, Duke had less difficulty. When Duke insisted on sitting down to *écarté* with him, Algy was too good-natured to balk him. Duke was a shocking bad player, and did not care for cards. Captain Beauclerc, on the contrary, was a great hand at *écarté*, and invariably won. When they had played for a certain time with advantageous results to Algy, he would throw down the cards and say,

"You are not in luck to-night, Duke. We won't play any more."

Then he would light a fresh cigar and stroll off to the club, leaving Duke and Angie to entertain each other. Duke was passionately fond of music, and Mrs. Beauclerc played and sang with considerable taste.

One evening Captain and Mrs. Beauclerc were dining alone. Angie took the opportunity at dessert of broaching the disagreeable subject of bills. It was always a very hard task to get money out of Algy for anything but his own amusements. He was like many another man, princely in lavishing it out of doors and in the eyes of the world, and a

very niggard at home, grumbling and quarrelling over household bills as if he were not the person who mainly contributed to swell them.

He was not in the very best of tempers that evening, but then he never was when his wife wanted money.

"I *must* have some money," said Angie, half positively, half entreatingly. "I have not paid the books for nearly three months."

"You go to work in such cursed extravagant style," returned her husband irritably, although no one liked good living better than himself.

"I do not think so," said Angie. "Besides, you are constantly bringing men in to lunch and dine, and you would be very much annoyed if things were not nice."

"The tradespeople must wait," growled Algy: (who could have imagined in society that the smiling, *débonnair*, silver-tongued Algy could look and speak so bearishly!). "I have no money, and that is the long and short of it."

"You have had your last quarter's income," replied Angie firmly, "and I *must* have money."

Algy looked across at her with a peculiar glance.

"Why don't you get it from Duke?" he asked.

Angie raised her large eyes to his face and regarded him steadily.

"Ask Duke to give me money to pay our household bills?" she said. "Shall I send in and ask

our next-door neighbour? It would be about as suitable."

Algy gave vent to rather a brutal laugh.

"You are a devilish clever actress, I have no doubt," he said. "Suppose, all the same, that you try your hand on Duke?"

He looked at her with a disagreeable smile, but she kept her eyes unflinchingly fixed on his.

"Do you mean to say," she asked, in a very cold, quiet voice, "that you think I am on such terms with Duke that I can ask him for money, and that under such circumstances you not only permit but connive at it? In that case, the sooner we discontinue his acquaintance the better. From to-morrow I shall forbid him the house."

Algy rose, dashed back his chair, and flung from the room with an impatient oath. He betook himself to his own little room and lighted a cigar, feeling very much perturbed in his mind. Angie was quite capable of doing it—how infernally strange she was! What a dreadful thing a clever wife was! You never could be up to her or know what she was at. What! lose Duke who had made his life so pleasant to him of late: Duke, in whose company and at whose expense he went everywhere and saw and did everything in the best and most comfortable way!

An hour later, Algy went into the drawing-room to look for his wife. He wore the charming, genial

expression with which the outside world was familiar, and, going up to her, he laid his hand on her shoulder.

"You needn't have cut up so rough just now, little woman," he said in the tone which he had used to her in bygone years when he loved her. "I was only joking. Do you think I don't know you, and wouldn't trust you anywhere, much more with old Duke, who's the best fellow in the world? I'll see about the money to-morrow, and let you have as much as I can. I'm off to the Club now. Can I do anything for you?"

"No, thank you," she answered coldly.

He stooped and kissed the top of her head, and then made for the door.

She looked after him. There was a strange mixture of contempt and yearning in her eyes—her lips quivered. When the front door closed with a bang, she threw down her book and burst into a passion of tears.

How she had loved that man! How faithful, how devoted, how loving she would have been to him if in those bygone days he had not worn out her love and patience by his selfishness, his vanity, his indifference!

This is the woman who for nearly ten years has exercised so mysterious and powerful an influence over Marmaduke Vereker; has governed his life,

regulated his habits, and given a general tone to his ideas. He owes her nothing but good; she has been the making of him, as Lady Chester frankly says. She has fostered good and generous impulses in him; has toned down his boisterous spirits, polished his rough and ready manner, and improved his taste in many ways, especially as regards her own sex, and the choice of companions in his own.

To-day Duke is extremely ill at ease; he is like a man who has been walking tranquilly and confidently along a smooth and pleasant road, at whose right hand a new path has suddenly opened, showing glimpses of a magic land strewn with rare flowers, peopled by alluring, beckoning forms. But the end of the vista lies in shadow.

Up to this period no girl has ever made any particular impression upon him; not one has ever given him dreams of domestic joys of which he should be the head and centre. But this slender, fragile young girl, with her large eyes in which there is so much soul, fire, depth; the eyes of the devoted young priestess of some great temple, has disturbed all Duke's heart; put new, troublesome, yearning thoughts into him, made havoc of his calm content as did the taste of the apple with our first parents' peace. If it were not for Angie!

Then his generous heart revolts against his own ingratitude. Has not she been his salvation? Does

he not owe nearly all the happiness of his life to her? And yet, for the moment, a strange new face has almost tempted him to wish that he had never known her. His brain is so busy that he feels little inclination for sport, and, though the sound of shots tells him that his party is not far off, he does not hasten to join it. On the contrary, arriving at a big tree with a bench beneath, he leans his gun against the trunk and sits down to continue his meditations.

"After all," he says to himself, "Angie is always persuading me to marry. Perhaps she means it—perhaps she would be glad if I did!"

But he knows that this reasoning is specious. Duke is a man of the world, and he is thoroughly aware that his marriage means utter loss and deprivation to Mrs. Beauclerc. It is not possible in the nature of things that she and his wife could be friendly—he would hardly even desire it. Angie has ruled him completely these ten years; ruled him with the lightest of hands, and he has gladly obeyed the least touch of her fingers, but if his heart is to own a new mistress, none but that mistress will be able to sway him henceforth—there must be no divided rule. And, of course, people being so good-natured as they are, no time will be lost in instilling false ideas into his wife's or his betrothed's ears about his relations with Mrs. Beauclerc. Angie herself is by far too proud and delicate-minded a woman to allow herself to be placed in the position of a

dethroned rival currying favour with the reigning sovereign.

If it were not for the loss to Angie! the terrible difference in her life that his absence from it would cause. If she would only let him make it up to her! and then he is angry with himself for having conceived so indelicate a thought as the bare idea implies. What! treat her like a cast-off mistress! compensate her with money and gifts for the loss of his affection! As if she, of all women the most sensitive, would not bitterly resent such an affront! If he marries, he knows that Angie will break with him, and so save him all the trouble and remorse; not openly, not with esclandre, but she will withdraw herself from his society and drop into a mere acquaintance. And it is the loss of pleasure and amusement to her which this involves; the loss of his houses, his yacht, the thousand pleasant parties of which she has been the real head and object that distresses Duke and makes him feel it a kind of treason to indulge in the thought of marrying. And then comes the reflection whether it is not rather absurd to be thinking at all about marriage with such a child as Cilla, but he banishes sense and reason with a vehement effort—it is her extreme youth, her innocence, her fragility that exercise so potent a charm over him. A fig for Belhaven! What business is it of his! If he can only get the child to love him! Ah! and he draws a long breath.

That if is a mighty factor in the question. She is not of the sort to sell herself for houses and lands and jewels. So much the more precious her love if he can but win it!

Then he indulges in the mistaken idea of his sex that he will compel her love by his intense devotion. I do not think women ever hold these false ideas—they know that the greatest obstacle to winning a man's love is letting him know the intensity of their feeling for him.

Duke returns home in time to send a letter commanding the immediate despatch of the pug. When it comes, he means to take it over himself to Red Meade in spite of his large house-party.

He is horribly bored all the evening, though he has two or three very pretty, charming women as guests, all on the alert to captivate and please him in the absence of Mrs. Beauclerc. He tries to rouse himself because it is his nature to be kind and a hospitable host, but they cannot help remarking that he is *distrait*, and put it down with some impatience to Angie's not being here.

"He cannot live without her," says one to another. "It is really too ridiculous."

But Duke is thinking of a childish face and figure; of the great, absorbed eyes. What is she doing? he wonders. Sitting in the low chair by the rose-shaded lamp lost in her book? or perhaps singing in her sweet, delicious voice whilst Belhaven sits

at his pretty wife's feet? or, and he does not like the idea so well, deep in some learned discussion with Bel? Or, would it be possible? and his heart leaps at the bare idea: might she be giving one little thought to him, just one faint wish to have him there, to see him again?

"God bless her! little darling, whatever she is doing!" and Duke heaves a big sigh, and his eyes are dim for a moment with his great tenderness for her.

CHAPTER X.

Mrs. Beauclerc is sitting by a bright fire in her pretty drawing-room. She is leaning back in a listless attitude, her eyes bent on the glowing coals which yet they scarcely seem to see—on her lap lies an open letter. We may stare hard at her; she is too deep in reverie to be disturbed, and we may be pardoned a little curiosity about a woman concerning whom the world has had so much to say.

She is not beautiful—indeed no—not even pretty. Elegant, *distinguée*, if you like; well-bred, well-dressed, that is all, but you may wonder with the rest of society what there is in her to have chained Duke Vereker so faithfully to her side these ten years. Her hair is of the darkest shade of brown;

she has large, expressive eyes; her other features are not remarkable; her complexion is pale, inclined to be rather dark than fair. If you saw her to-day for the first time, you would say without hesitation, "She is not a happy woman." Had you seen her last night, hostess to a cheery party, you would have thought her the brightest, most vivacious creature in the world. When in society you see a very gay, bright-mannered woman, you may always be quite sure there is a reverse to the medallion, and that she passes many sorrowful, gloomy hours at home.

One glance at Angie Beauclerc's speaking face this morning will tell you how far removed from her is any happy or pleasant thought. Now and then her whole frame is shaken by so profound a sigh that it seems to come from the very depths of her heart. Her body is listless, unnerved, but her mind is working with intense, absorbing energy. What can be the subject which moves her so deeply!

She is reviewing the past, the present, the future; her phalanxes continue to march past sometimes in slow time, sometimes at the double—the formation of the ranks is always the same. Somehow, though it is gone, and therefore not to be endured again, it is the past which stabs and hurts her most—it is the disappointment of bygone years rather than the blow which has fallen to-day that tears from her these long-drawn sighs. Shall we travel back with her? it will help us better to understand the Angie

of to-day—the woman whom the world has maligned, traduced, fawned upon, and flattered—it will tell us how far society's judgments are to be relied on, and how the links of the chain were made upon which the world could, naturally, only pronounce as a whole. Fourteen years—it is a long time for a woman still young to look back on—fourteen years ago Angie was a girl of eighteen; a charming, sprightly creature, extremely attractive without being a beauty, and holding sway in more than one manly breast. She, however, had one great misfortune, bestowed probably by some insulted fairy god-mother—she had a heart. When she loved, it was recklessly, passionately, heedlessly—from her youth up, her dreams had been of love, love, always love—when her hero should ride by, she would be waiting for him, and she would follow whithersoever he bade her. And the malicious, heartless jade, Fate, ordained that, to the girl's glamoured eyes, Algernon Beauclerc should appear as the chivalrous heroic being for whom her heart had lain in wait. He was a dashing young cavalry soldier in those days, with curly chestnut hair and blue eyes which promised more fidelity than the owner was capable of. Mr. Beauclerc was much charmed with Angie, who was at that moment the centre of attraction in the country house where both were guests—other men admired her, a sure way to the *heart* of a man of his stamp: and she possessed five hundred pounds a year. The young

people fell in love—only one thing was needed to knit their passion with bands of iron—opposition—and this was plentifully given by Angie's people. No doubt it was provoking that when a baronet with any number of thousands a year was dying to endow her with them, she should take it into her head to love (Pshaw! who invented that sickening word!) an extravagant, impecunious, wild young soldier who was sure to make a most indifferent husband.

But Angie was faithful, heroic, resolute. Mr. Beauclerc got his troop, sold out, and he and his six hundred a-year were mated to Angie and her five—a nice comfortable little income one might think for a couple of devoted young people.

There is not, however, so much spending in eleven hundred a-year as some people might think; especially when the man is extravagant and self-indulgent, to say nothing of his having a little sheaf of unpaid bills to start with, and when the girl has been brought up in the lap of luxury without the faintest idea of how to keep house. But Angie was no weak, foolish, irresponsible creature—she had an excellent head and a devoted heart—if she made mistakes to begin with, she speedily learned to set them right—her management soon left little to complain of. Ah! if inexperience had been all she had to contend with!

It is a grievous thing to lose by death the man whom you fondly love—when thus bereaved, you

think there is no keener agony in all life's plenteous quiver of torments that can assail you; but days go by—the first maddening pangs subside; you grow to do without the dear presence which once was all in all to you—in time you smile; you grow cheerful, you laugh, until one day you wake up shocked to find that it is almost an effort of memory to recall the beloved face; the sayings and doings even of your lost love.

There *is* a crueller pain. It is to love with all the passion and tenderness of which your heart is capable, and day by day to find the veil dropping from your eyes until you know that you have given your love and life unworthily; that he whom you thought true, brave, and kind, is mean, selfish, heartless. To suffer indifference in return for your devotion; to hear from the lips which once breathed fondest flattery cold and coarse and unkind words; to feel that instead of a blessing, you are a burden; to be treated as only a woman can be treated by an ungenerous man, and as he would only dare to treat a wife.

That was Angie's fate.

How did she bear it? Was she a patient Grizel? Could she endure neglect and indignity, and wait until it pleased her lord to change his mood? Alas, no, poor soul! She could have borne misfortune, privation, most of the ills that flesh is heir to by the side of a man who loved and was good to her.

She was brave and true as steel; the things she could not bear were neglect, injustice, harshness. Therefore she rebelled and raged against these in her heart. She deluged her pillow with tears; she made scenes; she reproached her husband, and by that very means made him ten times colder, more impatient, more neglectful.

Her life was a torment, because she still loved him; because she could not, would not see that her ship was stranded, and that she had best leave it, and save what she could before all went to pieces together. She could not yet say, "If he is lost to me, if I am disappointed in him, there are other things in life." No! she must win or compel him back, or she would have nothing else. So eighteen months went by, eighteen months of daily misery and heartache, with fitful attempts at reconciliation, and strivings on her part to bring back the truant to her side.

Most unfortunately, she had fallen into delicate health, aggravated by her unhappiness. Captain Beauclerc was a man who wanted to be amused, and who would be amused. Self-sacrifice was an unknown quality to him. It would never have occurred to him for one instant to remain beside the couch of a sick wife, nor attempt to alleviate her dulness. His sole care was to get rid of his own. Therefore, evening after evening he dined out, leaving Angie to her own sad meditations.

"Why don't you have some woman to come and stay with you?" he said, irritably, when she complained of loneliness. But a proud woman, a woman who still loves, is not solicitous of eye witnesses to her wretchedness and desolation. As for her own people, Angie was perfectly aware that their sympathy would only take the "I told you so" form, so eminently hateful to victims writhing under the bitter consciousness of a cruel mistake.

One of Angie's greatest trials; the source of constantly recurring scenes between her husband and herself was money. Captain Beauclerc attended races; Captain Beauclerc smoked expensive cigars; Captain Beauclerc drank champagne when he dined at his club; Captain Beauclerc wore gardenias in his button-hole; but when he was called upon to produce money for the butcher and the baker, he was fain to pay them with anathemas; to curse them for extortionate rogues, and to swear that he had not the wherewithal to meet their infernal, swindling demands. Though he was in the habit of bringing in men to lunch and dine, and would have been furious had there been only a cold mutton-bone to set before them, he invariably railed against Angie when the bills came in as though he were called upon to pay for her greediness and gluttony. Indeed, men are apt to behave towards their wives over weekly bills as though these unfortunate ladies had *in propria persona* consumed the whole of the viands.

Angie had the most honourable sentiments, and was just and liberal by disposition; debt was abhorrent to her—to be asked two or three times for the payment of a bill was a deadly disgrace in her eyes. Captain Beauclerc, on the contrary, would have chucked his bills behind the fire and gone on spending his ready money on himself until one day, when ruin overtook him, he would have been extremely surprised, not to say indignant.

We may imagine, then, that when Mrs. Beauclerc asked for money, and Captain Beauclerc angrily declared his inability to give it, the occasion was not conducive to domestic harmony. Angie would probably begin in a coaxing manner; Algy would plead utter impecuniosity. Angie, with rising temper, would assert the necessity of paying for what was consumed in the house; he would tax her with extravagance; she would return to the charge, declaring that she felt like a thief and a robber, and that it would be well for him to be honest before he indulged in expensive habits and amusements. This invariably gave him the opportunity of putting himself into a passion and declaring that his life was—the reverse of heaven; that he wished he had never seen her; that people who were paupers were fools to marry, etc., etc., etc. Tableau. Tears from the lady; exit by the gentleman after, perhaps, flinging down a couple of sovereigns on the table with much such an air as the gentleman in the play

throws the purse to the poor Dame aux Camélias. He would then betake himself to the club (the scene having as usual taken place after dinner), would drop into a theatre with a friend, and not improbably help entertain a small and select party at supper afterwards, when somehow money would be forthcoming from that pocket (so empty at home) to pay for champagne and other delicacies. Algy was such a generous, good-tempered, kind-hearted fellow —so said his friends, of whom he had a considerable number.

Angie, however, after a scene with her husband, had no such distractions as the play, or a *petit souper*. She acted her own tragedy at home alone; she had bitter thoughts for food, and salt tears for drink. Then sleepless hours, waiting for the return of the Prodigal, whom, most unhappily for her, she still loved. She knew what he was; she despised him, and yet she loved him—crueller pain than death.

What anguish, what blind rages, what despairing thoughts assailed her! She would leave him; she would kill herself; she would fly to the uttermost parts of the earth. Women of Angie's temperament always go through these phases of violent resolve, and come back crouching from very heart-hunger to sue for crumbs of love from the hand of their tyrant. That is to say, for a certain time. The hour came when Angie, having strangled, and crushed, and killed her love, came to feel for the man she had

adored a cold, calm contempt. She tolerated him; for her own sake she did not care to quarrel with him. He thought her amazingly improved, and they got on "quite nicely." She had her boy now—the love of the child, which brings no disappointment with it. The mother who loves tenderly and wisely need fear no rival, no falling off in the love of her offspring.

It was at this period that Duke Vereker came upon the scene, and made so great a change in her life. Let the truth be spoken. Duke fell madly in love with her. As she sits, these ten years later, looking into the glowing coals, with the open letter on her lap, she is thinking of Duke, and remembering how, in this very room, he sobbed out the passionate misery of his heart because she was not to be moved by any entreaties to return more than a friendly kindness to his love. He would have given her all he had. He had implored her to leave the man who cared so little for her (he was so desperately heart-sick that he had got beyond remembrance of the dishonour he was doing his pretended friendship for her husband). Yet, after all, it was not pretended friendship; for he really liked Algy. Only it hardly seemed to him as though taking from a man something he did not care for or value was robbing him. He would have gladly given him twenty, nay, fifty thousand pounds damages, which he knew would more than have consoled him.

But Angie's heart had grown blank as far as men were concerned, and she possessed that strong instinct of self-respect which prevents some women lapsing from virtue, even under temptation. But in this case there was no temptation. She grew fond of Duke, in a motherly, protecting way; his devotion consoled and pleased her, but love! She, the romantic, passionate young creature of yore, had grown to make a wry face over the word now. She held the world and men in a sort of bitter scorn; it amused her to see how meretricious, how corruptible were the laws of society; how it can be daunted and cowed by a brazen front; how it can tolerate glaring vice, and hound down faltering virtue.

She had given up her hopes of love, but now her eyes were open to see that there were other pleasant things in life—over these her friendship with Duke gave her full range.

And her husband approved; it was he who was for ever throwing open his hospitable doors to his eager young guest.

Bitter was the scorn that curled Angie's lip; she became a cynic in her heart, but she was too clever to show it—the world resents nothing so much as being found out and despised.

Angie *knew* that she would live down the world's calumny; a woman backed by her husband is quite sure of doing that. And she had the knowledge of her own integrity; the day would never come when

her son could look askance at her—the only thing she would have dreaded.

Meantime, she took her pleasure; was envied, caressed; had become a person of considerable social importance, and, having forgotten her heart-hunger, her disappointment, even her bitterness, since life went smoothly with her, was no more than, nor yet half so much to be commiserated as, most of her sex. There was not a shadow of remorse connected in her mind with Duke; he had been distinctly the better for her—her influence over him had been used solely for his good. And, after his first passionate chafings, he had sunk down into the place she had given him. She had become a necessity to him; she amused him, advised him, took care of him; his mind leaned upon hers: he wanted a home, and, where she was, grew to be home to him. Habit chained him to her as it frequently chains a man to wife and home long after passion has died out. Captain Beauclerc was his greatest man friend. Duke had quite forgotten that he had ever entertained a treacherous thought towards him.

To-day, for the first time, Angie fully realises that the chain which she fancied iron was made of cobwebs, and that friendship is but a poor factor when love comes along with his bow and arrow.

And, that we may be fully able to comprehend why Angie is gazing beyond the red embers at the

ruined fragments of her hopes, we will look over her shoulder and read the letter which at this very moment she has begun to study for the fifth time.

"The Court, Nov. —th, 187—.

"My dear Angie,

"Why are you not here? We miss you very much indeed. Lady Chester is of course a charming hostess, but the Court never seems quite itself without you. And, to plunge at once into the subject of my letter, its master wants you, for just now he seems to be disposed to make rather a goose of himself. Imagine that on one of his big days last week, he transferred his duties as host to Sir John and started off in his dog-cart. And what do you think for? Why, to take a pug-dog to a young lady of sixteen for whom he has conceived a strange infatuation. Twice since then he has ridden or driven over to Red Meade (Lady Belhaven's sister is the young enchantress), and last night he confided to me in a sort of vague, rambling, hesitating way that he was (he did not use the term 'in love,' but there was no mistaking his meaning) fascinated by the most charming creature who ever breathed the breath of life. He does not say that she is beautiful; but she possesses something that in his eyes evidently makes beauty a very second-hand article, and she is so astonishingly clever that I almost wonder her friends do not exhibit her in a caravan.

However, when I ventured gently to put a leading question to Lady Chester on the subject this morning, she replied with just the least shade of irritation that she really thought her brother had taken leave of his senses. Miss St. George was quite a child, not pretty; at least not by the side of Lady Belhaven; exceedingly shy, and if she possessed the wonderful talent of which Mr. Vereker raved, she had most successfully kept her light under a bushel during her visit to the Court.

"I only know Lady Belhaven slightly, but she is a thorough woman of the world, and, having made such a good match herself, we may be sure she will leave no stone unturned to catch Mr. Vereker for her sister. Therefore, my dear Angie, as I imagine this sudden passion to be merely a freak born of idleness and your absence, do make it convenient to come down and instil a little common sense into your friend who seems sadly in need of it. Lady Chester was only this morning bitterly deploring your absence from the Court.

"I have not time for another word—we are just going to drive.

"Always your affectionate,
"NINA CLAYTON."

It is part of Angie's nature to take pessimist views of life—she is always prepared for the worst; always expects it. Therefore, having read this letter

over and over again, and knowing that, as Mrs. Clayton is really her friend, there is nothing "set down in malice," she at once bids farewell to the brightest side of her life and plunges into gloomy anticipations of the future, as though Duke's wedding-bells were ringing in her ears and his marriage was a *fait accompli*.

Angie is no intriguing schemer. She is far too high-spirited to dream of plotting to wrest Duke's fancy from him, and she knows that once he marries, the reins will drop from her fingers, and that she will not even make the smallest effort to keep them. She is the last woman in the world to cajole or flatter Duke's wife; to cringe for crumbs when the whole loaf has been hers, and she knows, as a matter assured beyond all assurance, that Mrs. Vereker, let her be whom she may, will be taught to look askance at her as a rival, an enemy, a person to be ousted altogether from Duke's hearth and home. She is fond of Duke. She loves him with an honest affection. He has been the bright genius of her life, without him, and his love and kindness, the future offers a very blank prospect. Then, with a bitter sigh, she thinks of her husband. They have got on "quite nicely" for years; his regard for her has increased tenfold since Duke became their friend. How will he endure going back to genteel poverty; to living on eleven hundred a year, when he has enjoyed part possession of all Duke's thousands?

Then Angie thinks bitterly how all her fair-weather friends will drop off; how, with secret gratification, they will leave her to pay court to the bona-fide châtelaine of Duke's lands and castles; how, since there will be no more little dinners, no pleasant parties, no shooting or yachting invitations to be got from her, she will sink down into obscurity and insignificance. No stepping horses, no races, no opera-boxes: her husband soured and bitter—wrangles over weekly bills, as in the old days! But there is a thought which brings a deeper sting than any of these; it is her boy's future. She had looked forward to his going to Eton. She had always felt sure that Duke would somehow manage this in a way that need not hurt her pride, and, after all, where that idol of her heart was concerned, her pride was not likely to be very stubborn. Duke adored the boy: over and over again, he had spoken of the great things the lad was to do in the future, for which he seemed to hold himself responsible.

But Duke married. Duke with boys of his own——!

At this thought Angie's fortitude gives way. A stifled sob chokes her. She covers her face with her hands.

CHAPTER XI.

Mrs. Beauclerc possessed a strong fund of common-sense, and a very courageous temper; therefore, having given vent to her first burst of despair and gloomy forebodings, she proceeded to review matters with a calmer and more dispassionate judgment. Duke was in love; that was a fact not to be forgotten, or got over, and Duke was a man so desirable from every point of view as a husband, that the probability of his meeting with a refusal was very small indeed. But would he, did he seriously think of marrying a child of sixteen? Few men were more easily bored than Duke; few men stood more in need of a mind to lean on; a companion to amuse them than he—would he not, after the first fascination, the first strangeness of his singular fancy had worn off, find out that he had made a mistake, and be vexed with himself for having made it? And, if he had compromised himself at all, would he not be sure to fly to her to help him out of his difficulty? She wished ardently now to be at the Court. It was her own doing that she was not; she had herself proposed to defer her visit until the middle of December, and now, unless Duke pressed her

urgently to go to them before that date, she was reluctant to offer herself as a visitor. This in itself was a strange new phase; it was the first time she had ever hesitated to say to him, "I am coming," if it suited her to do so. But, up to this time, she had always been so certain of her welcome.

Duke was not much of a correspondent. Since the first days of their acquaintance when his eager boyish scrawl had daily covered sheets of paper until she had pointed out very firmly and kindly to him that these effusions were in every respect undesirable, and might do her serious harm, he had confined his letters to a few brief lines, telling her his movements in somewhat telegraphic style; they, however, almost invariably wound up with, "I miss you awfully. I wish you were here."

This little formula had been absent from Duke's last three letters, and Angie remarked it with a sigh. This made it all the more impossible for her to propose to anticipate the date fixed for her visit. So, with a heavy heart, she decided to wait and let matters take their own course.

Meantime Duke was in a very unsettled frame of mind. He was in that state when a man longs to be always talking about his passion and the object of it, and Mr. Vereker had no one in whose sympathising ear he could pour his hopes, his doubts, his fears. He longed for Angie's sympathy, Angie's

advice, and yet he could not conceal from himself that there would be something indelicate, not to say ridiculous, in confiding his love to the woman who, he had sworn ten thousand times, was the only one he had loved, did love, or ever could love. He tried to make himself believe that she would be glad to hear of his new affection; that, as she had so often urged him to marry, she would be pleased that he at last thought of taking her advice, but he was not able to delude himself; he knew that she would *not* be glad; that his marriage would make a terrible difference in her life, and that there was not one single point from which she would be able to regard it as a desirable event. But he was so harassed by his love that he felt at times, however she might receive it, he must tell her, must talk to her about it. Lady Chester treated the matter quite unsympathetically as a mere infatuation; she would not even speak seriously of it, and turned the subject when he would fain have enlarged upon it. And Duke was not quite in a position to say, even to himself, that he wanted to commit the rest of his life to this young girl's keeping without knowing more of her; without being sure of his ability to inspire her with a love answering his own. What he did wildly desire and long for was to see her constantly, to be with her, alone with her; to persuade himself that she was not indifferent to him—and this was just what he was unable to do.

He had left his shooting-party to take her the pug—she had been in raptures with it—her beautiful eyes had lighted up with pleasure and gratitude; she had said ten thousand things more with them than she meant or even knew. Duke was dying to be alone with her—what can one say with two other people present or even one person, unless he or she kindly and pointedly turns his or her back with a significance not to be misunderstood! But it was perfectly clear to him that Belhaven did not intend him to be alone with Cilla, and poor Duke left Red Meade vexed, put out, feeling anything but friendly to his host. If he could even have had a few minutes alone with Lady Belhaven, he might have spoken to her—women are always sympathetic in love matters, and besides, without flattering himself, Duke could feel tolerably certain that her ladyship would think him a desirable suitor for her sister. But Belhaven never gave him the chance: he remained resolutely with his guest during his entire stay. About a week later, Mr. Vereker, unable any longer to restrain his desire to see Cilla, drove over to Red Meade again.

This time he was even more unfortunate. Lady Belhaven was not well and confined to her room, and Cilla was in attendance upon her and only came down for about twenty minutes at lunch-time. Duke was delighted to see that the pug was already quite devoted to its mistress. After lunch he was half-minded to broach the subject of his admiration for

Cilla to Belhaven, but something in the latter's manner told him his confidence would not be well received—he remembered too what Dorothea had said of her husband's objection to Cilla marrying for some years to come.

So, chafing and irritated, Duke drove away from Red Meade, longing more and more after the girl and feeling farther than ever removed from her. If Belhaven were her father, brother, or legitimate guardian, it would have been different; but Duke only regarded him as an officious meddler. There was no getting away from the fact, however, that Cilla was only to be approached through him, and that if he chose to prevent or forbid any man seeing her, it was perfectly in his power to do so. His only chance was to make the girl so much in love with him that she would consent to his carrying her off, and how was he to do that if he never saw her alone! And Duke, being of a modest and diffident nature, felt by no means sure that he would be able to win Cilla's heart, even though the most ample opportunities for *solitudes à deux* were offered him.

So, at last, worried, restless, miserable, he resolved to seek Angie and to ask her sympathy and advice. In his own trouble of mind he began to forget his scruples of delicacy towards Mrs. Beauclerc —he was not more selfish than most of his sex, indeed not half so much so as a great many of them; but when a man is suffering, whether physically or

mentally, he is a little apt to forget the feelings and the convenience of other people. So Duke argued to himself that, after all, Angie would not mind, or if she did, he could not go on like this any longer as it was simply killing him by inches.

It is about four o'clock on a dull afternoon when Mr. Vereker's hansom dashes up to Mrs. Beauclerc's door. He has taken the precaution of telegraphing his intended advent to her, and therefore feels tolerably sure of finding her at home. A minute later he is in her presence, shaking her warmly by the hand, delighted to see her again, and looking the same cheery, devoted Duke as he has done these ten years. Unfortunately for herself, and for him too, Angie is in a highly nervous, irritable mood. It has been one of those black days with her in which everything goes wrong; days when a perverse fate seems to stand at one's elbow with a quiver full of little worries, which she sticks into one like arrows at every moment. Angie is not feeling well, besides —her nerves are jarred and untuned, a load lies at her heart; the times are out of joint; she sees only wretchedness and misfortune in front of her. And Duke's telegram has added the topmost stone to the pinnacle of her misery.

She had resolved that when they met she would greet him with smiles, with ready sympathy; she would take his news as though she expected and

was charmed with it. But what a nervous, sensitive woman resolves and what she does are sometimes two very different things, and this befalls Angie to-day.

She feels cold, unsympathetic, rather bitter against Duke. She has no inclination to help him with his story; to meet him half way, as she meant to do. She is, indeed, perversely disposed to hinder him; to make it uncomfortable and difficult for him. She is perfectly conscious of the unwisdom of this course; a very smart contest is going on in her heart between prudence and temper; but temper gains the day, and makes her angry, not only with him but with herself, and he, in consequence, has to suffer for both.

Though she compels her features to a smile, her manner is constrained. Duke does not feel himself thoroughly, perfectly at home with her, as is his wont; it is more like coming to call than coming home. And she asks after his sister, of his sport, and a hundred little company questions which remove him further than ever from his happy sense of familiarity with her. He had meant gently to lead up to his confession, but every time he makes the attempt she adroitly turns the conversation. He had hoped she might have some inkling of the truth. Knowing what friends she and Nina Clayton are, he had felt sure the latter would have told Angie something of his confidences. He grows more awkward,

more uncomfortable every moment, but he has come all the way from Blankshire to tell Angie, and he does not mean to be balked. There is nothing left but a plunge. He makes it.

"Angie!" he says desperately, (he only calls her thus in private). "Angie! I have got something to tell you."

"Yes?" she replies, disconcerting him by a look of polite interest as far removed from her usual sympathetic expression as anything can possibly be.

As Duke, however, has flung himself into the water, he must perforce swim. He does it very unscientifically.

"You have often advised me to marry, haven't you?" he says eagerly, with a gaze that seems to entreat her assent.

"Yes," she repeats in a tone that might mean yes, no, or anything else, so totally devoid of sympathy or interest is it. There is something in her throat which threatens to choke her: if she does not preserve the most rigid calm, she has a horrid suspicion that she will lose her self-control and give vent to the feeling of hysteria which oppresses her. It is not that she is in love with Duke; it is not that she is suffering the pangs of a heart which sees all it values reft from it and given to another—it is only a sort of dull, dumb pain which smites her as though everything pleasant in life has gone from her, and she stands solitary and alone in the world: only

a temporary depression which every feather weight goes to aggravate on a day like this.

Duke is hurt, wounded, disappointed. He would like her to show some emotion either of sympathy, disappointment, or anger; he is not prepared for her receiving this overwhelmingly important intelligence as a mere stranger, whose acquaintance he made ten minutes ago, might do.

"I thought," he continues in a deeply reproachful tone, after a moment's pause—"I thought you took some interest in my affairs."

"Certainly I do," she replies with a little pale, cold smile which does not give one at all the idea of a very vivid interest.

Duke rises and takes a hurried turn up and down the room as is his wont when excited. It is rather a difficult, not to say dangerous, feat amongst the numerous small tables and nick-nacks that make Mrs. Beauclerc's room so pretty.

"Pray mind the china!" says Angie quietly.

Duke pauses midway in his wild career and looks fiercely at her. His eyes say with singular plainness, "D—n the china!" but his lips are too accustomed to respect his hostess to utter it.

Angie ignores the look.

"You were saying," she remarks, "that I have often advised you to marry."

"So you have, scores of times," he answers hotly. "Therefore I should have thought that when

I came to tell you that I am thinking of marrying, you might care just perhaps a little to hear about it."

"Of course I care," she returns in the same quiet voice. "Who is the lady? And when is the wedding to take place?"

More mortified than ever, Duke goes to the window and stands drumming on the pane with his fingers. Never in the ten years that he has known Angie has he felt so angry with, so disappointed in her. For a moment he almost thinks of taking his hat, wishing her good-bye and going out of the house. But no! he has a devouring desire to talk about himself, and to whom can he talk if not to Angie! And, besides, she of all people ought to know. To know what! When he comes to think about it, there is not very much to know after all. He is in love, but there is not the faintest shadow of certainty that his love is going to be crowned by success.

If he feels angry with Angie, it is certain that she feels but little better disposed towards him.

"Ah," she thinks bitterly, "they are all alike—utterly, thoroughly selfish. Here is the man who on his knees in this very room, sobbing like a child at my feet, swore his unalterable devotion to me, and it does not seem to strike him that there is the slightest want of fine feeling in bringing his new passion straight to me and expecting me to fall into ecstacies over it."

She does not attempt to help him by even so much as a word, but sits looking a little scornfully at the fire and playing with the diamonds on her fingers. Duke's wrath is gradually melting away—he has had leisure to remind himself that it was hardly to be expected that Angie should feel or show any great pleasure at the news he has brought her. Presently he leaves the window and draws a chair close to her side.

"I suppose," he says rather diffidently, "that when one is saddled with a lot of property, it is a sort of duty to marry. You know," taking her hand and pressing it, "whom I would have married if I could."

Angie's lip curls a little, and she gently draws away her hand without returning Duke's pressure.

"Naturally," she answers, ignoring the latter part of his speech.

"Of course I don't know—nothing is settled—indeed I have had no opportunity of speaking to her about it. Belhaven won't let me be alone with her for a moment," Duke goes on awkwardly, "but I have seen the only girl I ever wanted to marry, for a good many years, at least."

"But Lady Belhaven?" returns Angie. "Surely she would be able to find opportunities for you to see her sister!"

"Oh, she's all right enough!" says Duke. "But Belhaven's a crotchety fellow, you know, and he has

got some ridiculous idea that she is too young even to think of getting married. Why, that is the very delight and charm to me," he cries fervently—"her youth—her innocence!"

Does the wind, hurrying by, guess what sounds it will draw from an Eolian harp? Can one expect a man with not very fine perceptions to know what chords he is striking at random in a sensitive woman's heart?

At his last words, the sob which Angie has been doing stern battle with ever since Duke entered the room, rises to her throat, and with a sudden, passionate gesture she bursts into a flood of tears. Duke is distracted. He is on his knees beside her in a moment, uttering every soothing, endearing word that he can think of. He sees it all now. Oh, why did he not know or guess before how much she loved him! How perverse is Fate only to let him discover it too late!

And Angie, in the midst of her irrepressible outburst of emotion, reads his thoughts so plainly from his words that she is seized with a hysterical desire to laugh at the ludicrous point of the situation. She is furious with herself, besides, for having behaved in such an utterly tactless, foolish manner; more like a silly school-girl than a woman of the world. Presently she makes a mighty effort, checks her sobs, releases herself from Duke, and, standing at a little distance from him, says hurriedly,

"Don't take any notice of this! I have been a good deal worried to-day. Go down into Algy's room for ten minutes, and smoke a cigarette. I will run and bathe my eyes. You will find me all right when you come back."

And with a nod and a smile she leaves him.

Duke feels no inclination to smoke just now. He stays where he is, and, dropping into the chair vacated by Angie, proceeds to ruminate.

"Poor little woman!" Ah! what a change in a man's heart it tells of when his divinity, his sovereign, his queen, comes down to be apostrophised as "Poor little woman!" He will never give her up. No, not for fifty wives. She shall always be his best, his dearest friend. It shall be part of his marriage contract that Angie shall have her place in his heart and home. The judicious reflections which Duke has previously made as to the impracticability of such a scheme vanish into thin air for the moment. They will return later, but, just now, his heart speaks louder than his common-sense.

Barely ten minutes have elapsed before Angie trips in, the old, smiling, friendly Angie whom he has known so long.

It has grown dusk. No one need know that she has been crying.

"I must tell you, my dear," she says in her own bright voice, laying a friendly hand on Duke's arm, "that I have had a heap of little worries to-day.

My nerves were all unstrung. When you came in, I was on the point of having a crying fit. You staved it off for a little, but it was bound to come. I am dreadfully sorry to have inflicted it upon you, but it has done me all the good in the world. And now, I want to hear about your charming little friend, and your future plans and prospects, and in short—everything."

Duke looks at her a little bewildered. This is a very clever bit of acting certainly, but it does not take him in. He will be most careful not to hurt her feelings; not to say too much about her rival.

But, after all, poor fellow, he is but as wax in Angie's fingers; in half an hour she has drawn every thought and wish of his heart from him—he has not kept one secret in the world from her.

His face is eager and smiling; this long talk about himself, his hopes and fears, has done him an immense deal of good—there is no one like Angie.

Angie listens with sympathetic looks and gestures. There is no outward sign of the growing feeling of coldness, of loneliness, of friendlessness that is creeping to her heart. She has never loved Duke, it is true, in the sense in which the word is oftenest used, but he has given her most of the pleasure and happiness she has enjoyed in her life.

And now she is to lose him. For, let him make

what protestations he will, she knows well enough that Duke, married, will never again be friend to Angie Beauclerc.

CHAPTER XII.

And Cilla! What were her ideas on the subject of Mr. Vereker and his attentions? With a heart like hers, passionately eager to give and receive love, was it likely that she would be unable to read the symptoms of passion so openly revealed by Duke's words and glances?

Grown-up people, even in spite of their own experience, will persist in looking upon girls of fifteen and sixteen as mere children with utterly undeveloped ideas about love, and an utter incapacity to feel it; a girl's love is spoken slightingly, smilingly of as "a childish fancy;" the idea that it is keener, stronger, more intense, more exacting, more passionately jealous than that of a woman of five and twenty would be contemptuously pooh-poohed by them.

Yet so it is. There is in a girl's love the strength of freshness, of ardent belief, a hopefulness as yet untarnished by disappointment, and there is the natural and scarcely blameable selfishness or perhaps self-consciousness of youth which is apt to make itself the pivot on which everything turns.

It was only natural that Cilla, after her joyless, unloved childhood, should be prone to regard the first man who showed her admiration and attention, who flattered her vanity and her sense of importance, as something like a hero. A girl of Cilla's disposition lives so much in dreams and romantic imaginings that the less she sees of the man whom she has set up to worship (if he be like Duke, rather a prosaic sort of person), the more influence he is likely to get over her mind. The man upon whom Cilla actually bestowed her first love was no more the real Duke than was his home-spun shooting-coat the gilded armour which Cilla's fairy princes invariably went about in. She could read with delight of tender or passionate love-makings, but her sensitive and delicate nature would have shrunk terrified into itself if Mr. Vereker had proceeded practically to illustrate them. She was quite content with the occasional sight of him in company with other persons, and felt no ill-will at all to her brother-in-law for putting obstacles between them. The young girl who has not been fed on worldly maxims thinks of the lover, not the husband—marriage is the final end of love-making and worship in her eyes—not the prelude to it.

Lord Belhaven and his wife had had more than one discussion on the subject of Duke's feelings and intentions—their ideas, however, were diametrically opposed. My lord maintained that it would be

doing a positive wrong to Cilla to allow him to approach her with words of love. My lady considered that to let such a golden opportunity slip would be an act qualifying the perpetrator for instant admission to Hanwell.

"What can the child know about love!" said Belhaven warmly. "Mewed up in a school-room all her life, filling her poor little head, when she got the chance, with a lot of romantic rubbish, why, of course she is ready to make a hero of the first man who says a civil word to her. Duke is a good, honest, well-meaning fellow, but he is the last man to satisfy a nature like Cilla's."

"He could satisfy something better than her nature," observed Dorothea drily—"she would be the most fortunate girl in the world."

"Oh, Cilla, is not like—" you, he was going to say, but checked himself and substituted "some women." "Diamonds and fine houses are not her *summum bonum* of the world's delights."

"That is because she has had no experience of them," returned Dorothea. "Cilla is just as fond of smart frocks and making herself look well as anyone else."

"That comes from the love of approbation inherent in every nice-minded woman," said Belhaven. "What I say is that she would not set the greatest value on worldly prosperity, but would think a great deal more of her affections."

"Anyone might be fond of Duke," exclaimed Dorothea. "Why, what can you possibly have against him?"

"I have nothing against him," retorted Belhaven with some impatience, "but I want the child to have the opportunity of seeing other men before she is asked to make up her mind about one. She has plenty of time before her. Pshaw! the idea of thinking of letting her marry at present is utterly absurd. I shall take care Duke does not get the chance of saying anything to her—if he attempts it, I shall tell him my views at once, and I shall think it my duty to talk very seriously to her too."

Dorothea felt provoked, but she was not given to contention and argument, so she said lightly,

"I think we are doing something very like counting our chickens before they are hatched. Wait till Angie Beauclerc appears on the scene—I don't imagine we shall see very much of Duke after that."

"So much the better," replied Belhaven.

Dorothea had no intention of quarrelling with her husband, or of defying him openly on Cilla's account, but she considered it a positive duty not to let Duke slip through their fingers, and her great anxiety was to get him to commit himself by a declaration before Mrs. Beauclerc arrived. And first, though Belhaven had particularly desired her not to broach the subject to her sister, she, regarding the

marriage vow of obedience as an absurd, obsolete, and meaningless form, took the opportunity of sounding Cilla the day after Duke's last visit. Her husband had gone shooting. She and Cilla were sitting over the big wood-fire in the morning-room.

"I am sorry I did not see Duke yesterday," remarks her ladyship.

Cilla, hearing her sister's voice, raises her eyes from her book.

Dorothea repeats her remark.

"He is such a nice fellow," she adds.

"Yes," responds Cilla with great cordiality.

"I suppose," proceeds my lady, with a pleasant little smile, "that you are the object of attraction. He comes to see you."

A faint colour rises to the girl's cheeks, a smile to her profound eyes: proofs that she admits the soft impeachment.

"It is very——" Dorothea was about to say "wonderful," but changed it into "nice, that he should have taken such a fancy to you. Such lots of girls have tried for him. Of course one does not know that he has any serious intentions, but one might soon find out, if Bel were not so tiresome."

Cilla is a little embarrassed to know what to say. She stoops, and lifts the pug, (Duke's gift), from the rug, where he lies crouched at her feet, and kisses his satin ears, and puts his soft, black muzzle against her cheek.

"Would you not like to be Mrs. Vereker?" says Dorothea pleasantly. "Duke is ten times as rich as Bel. You would be a much greater person than me, though you would not have a title."

A smile dimples Cilla's cheeks. She cannot help being a little flattered by her sister's words.

"If Bel would only let him speak now," proceeds Dorothea, half frightened at her own temerity, but buoyed up by the consciousness that she is doing her duty to her sister. "When Mrs. Beauclerc comes, your chance will be gone."

"Mrs. Beauclerc!" and Cilla opens her large eyes to their full extent, and fixes them on Dorothea's face.

Lady Belhaven feels slightly provoked. Cilla causes her perpetual annoyance by her stupid innocence; her want of intuition in worldly matters. It is so horrid to have to enter into explanations, and in society, a word, a glance convey things which it is difficult to say out-right. But Cilla is transfixing her with those great, embarrassing eyes, and she must perforce make an effort to explain.

"Mrs. Beauclerc is—is a great friend of Duke's —at least she has immense influence over him."

"I remember seeing her with him in the Park," interrupts Cilla, "the Sunday that you were first engaged to Granville. Colonel Lynn pointed her out to me. I admired her very much."

"I do not know what there is to admire in her,"

returns Dorothea with some shortness, "except that she dresses well. I never could see anything in her. She isn't a bit good-looking. No one can imagine why Duke should be so infatuated about her. She is a horrid, designing creature, and once she comes here, you will see no more of him."

"But," says Cilla, looking mystified, "I thought she was married."

Dorothea pauses for a moment to wonder whether her sister's innocence is real or assumed. Then she says, with a shade of impatience,

"Oh, yes, she has a husband, or of course Duke would have married her long ago. But she has Duke entirely under her thumb—she is poor, and she makes use of his money and his belongings as though they were her own, so of course, you see, she would not let him marry because it would be her ruin."

"But," says Cilla, "I suppose he might still be friends with her even if he did marry."

Lady Belhaven is on the verge of losing her temper.

"Look here, my dear," she remarks, sitting up in her chair and speaking with unwonted quickness, "I am not going to enter into explanations—if you don't understand me, it is not worth while to enlighten you, but remember this: Mrs. Beauclerc is your deadly enemy, and though she might smile and fawn upon you and seem devoted to you, she

would be all the time undermining you and leaving no stone unturned to get Duke away from you. She is a most dangerous woman, so now I have warned you."

A frightened look has crept into Cilla's eyes. Has she not over and over again read of the wicked, serpent-like women who have come between the hero and heroine in her romances!

But, all the same, Duke is invested with a new interest in her eyes, and she is more than ever disposed to regard him as the lover of her dreams.

It is ten days after this conversation when Mr. Vereker pays a visit to Red Meade. This time, Fortune favouring him, permits him to steal a march on Cilla's self-constituted guardian. He arrives soon after noon and finds the girl alone in the morning-room, buried in the big chair by the fire just as he had seen her first. Duke's heart beats nervously—the sensation is a very unusual one for him—his nature is placid, and things have gone smoothly with him of late years. To-day he is moved by more than one emotion. There is the keen pleasure of seeing Cilla again, and there is the feeling that his time and opportunity have come; that he is going to take the most important step in his life, and that he is defying Belhaven. For what he does he must do quickly—he may only have one minute in which to tell his love what he feels for her. This is unfortunate for him—haste and ardour

are not the qualities with which it is suitable to approach a sensitive and innocent young maiden—they are, on the contrary, quite certain to repel and alarm her. But Duke is like a boy snatching at a flower whilst the gardener's eye is momentarily averted.

Even as the door closes on the servant he takes her hands and says, in a voice of whose intensity he is not conscious,

"I am so awfully glad to see you again. I have thought of nothing else since I was here last."

Cilla who, a moment ago, was calmly reading in her big chair, feels something as a traveller sitting on a summer day by a placid mountain stream might do on raising his eyes and beholding an avalanche impending. Her breath is taken away; her heart stands still—she experiences a feeling of terror, a desire for flight. That Duke should love her and want to marry her has been a perfectly acceptable idea to her imagination, but the passionate haste of this declaration is as disagreeable to her as it is unexpected. He, however, being animated by the feeling that he must seize the opportunity whilst it is his, does not take warning by the expression of surprise and alarm in her eyes, but hurries on.

"Tell me, darling, that you have thought a little about me," and he stoops, and essays to put one arm round her.

But in an instant she avoids him, and runs to the other side of the table, where she stands trembling, and regarding him with eyes that express anything rather than love or pleasure. Upon which Duke wakes to a horrible consciousness that he is a fool and a brute. It would never have entered his brain to behave in this way if he had not been goaded by the fear of losing his only chance. He calms down in a moment.

"Did I frighten you? I'm so awfully sorry. What a brute I am! I forgot myself for a moment. I was so glad to see you."

These disjointed sentences he pours out in the most humble and penitent tone.

Poor Cilla is intensely embarrassed; a little bit ashamed of herself, and conscious of a poignant regret that Duke should have caused this feeling of repulsion in her.

"Won't you come back to your chair, and let me talk to you?" he says entreatingly. "I promise not to forget myself again."

Thus urged, Cilla, with down-cast eyes, comes from behind her bulwark and resumes her seat by the fire.

"Good Heavens!" exclaims Duke, seeing that her hands are trembling, "is it possible that I have frightened you? I shall never forgive myself. I only wanted to tell you," trying to make his voice as matter-of-fact and unloverlike as possible, "that I

love you with all my soul, and that I want you to try and care a little bit for me. Do you think," wistfully, "you ever might?"

Poor Cilla is desperately disconcerted at being unable to answer him in the affirmative. At this moment she feels that his presence is the reverse of agreeable to her, and that it would be impossible ever to feel any emotion of love for him.

"I do not know," she utters in a low, embarrassed voice.

"But you will try, won't you?" he entreats.

Fortunately for Cilla, she is saved the necessity of answering, by the entrance of her sister. Dorothea would not have broken in upon a *tête-à-tête*, from which she hoped great things, only that, from her window, she had seen her lord coming up the drive, and knew what disgrace would befall her if he came in and found Duke and Cilla alone together.

Under the circumstances, Lady Belhaven's appearance was a relief to both, especially to Cilla, who, protected by the presence of a third person, began to recover her equanimity, and to feel more friendly towards her would-be lover, and rather vexed with herself.

Belhaven, not knowing that the mischief had been done, greeted Duke pleasantly enough, although he was not particularly rejoiced to see him.

Lunch went off cheerily. Duke was fast forgetting his rebuff, and Cilla her shyness. The man's

love and admiration were gradually ripening in the presence of his child-love. The child herself had a little sense of importance and pleasure in thinking of her conquest. Duke, as he looks at her, tells himself that it was natural she should have been surprised and frightened; that her behaviour did not prove dislike or repugnance to him. He is quite bent on winning her. Before he leaves the house he will have an explanation with Belhaven. And, no sooner has the door closed upon the ladies, than he plunges into his subject.

"You guess, no doubt, why I come here so often, Bel," he says. "I am in love with your sister-in-law. I want to marry her."

Lord Belhaven's face instantly assumes an expression the reverse of encouraging.

"Really, my dear Duke," he replies, with extreme coldness, "your declaration is so very premature that I scarcely know how to receive it with any approach to seriousness."

"How premature!" cries Duke, bracing himself for battle.

"How premature?" repeats Belhaven in a slow, measured voice. "Cilla is sixteen and a half; a child who, but for accidental circumstances, would now be in the school-room—there can be no question of her marrying at present."

"I do not see that at all," says Duke with warmth. "Lots of girls are married at seventeen."

"More shame for their parents," returns Belhaven curtly.

"Pardon me, Bel," proceeds Duke. "I don't see exactly that it is a question of your opinion. Miss St. George will shortly be, if she is not now, of an age that is considered marriageable by the laws of the land, and if a man wishes to marry her, against whom you can bring no valid objection and she consents, I don't see that you have the smallest shadow of a right to interfere."

"I have a valid objection," remarks Belhaven quietly.

"If you mean—" cries Duke hotly, jumping to the conclusion that his friend is thinking of Mrs. Beauclerc.

But Belhaven interrupts him.

"Let me tell you what I do mean," he says. "It is the simpler way."

His dogmatic tone irritates Duke intensely—he had never known before that the fellow was such a confounded prig.

"My objection," proceeds Belhaven, "is that Cilla has never had the opportunity of seeing much of any other man but yourself, and that she is therefore absolutely incapable of knowing whether she cares for you or not."

"That is just her charm," cries Duke. "The very fact that she has not been hawked about like other girls or had men making love to her——"

"That may be her charm for you," returns Belhaven drily, "but, you see, I was thinking about her."

"I should worship her," says Duke. "I would do everything a man could do to make his wife happy. I would devote myself entirely to her, and I suppose my position and fortune give me the right to feel that, when I ask a girl to marry me, I am not committing a very presumptuous action."

"Oh," answers Belhaven, "I am quite aware that almost any girl you could ask would be ready to jump down your throat, only, you see, Cilla happens to be different. Don't mistake me, my dear Duke," as it occurs to him that he is not treating his guest very considerately. "I know you are a thorough good fellow and would do your best to make a woman happy, and I know too that you are doing my little sister-in-law an honour by wishing to marry her. But she and I have been thrown a good deal together: I have studied her character: she is exceptionally sensitive and affectionate: to be married to a man whom she could not give her whole heart to would be a sort of death in life to her. And don't you think, yourself, it would be very unfair to her to take advantage of her youth and ignorance, and to try to bind her to you by a promise before she has had any real experience of life, or any opportunity of knowing what love is? Poor little girl! her head is brimful of the most

romantic ideas now: before she settles down, she ought to have the edge taken off them by some contact with a 'work-a-day world.'"

Duke does not see the force of the other's reasoning. A man, with even as little conceit as he has, does not like to have it hinted that he is incapable of satisfying the heart of the woman he is in love with. He says rather sulkily,

"If you persist in refusing to give me the chance of seeing and being alone with Miss St. George, I hardly see how I am likely to make any way in her affections."

"You shall see as much as you like of her on one condition," answers Belhaven. "If you will give me your word of honour not to make any declaration to, nor to extract any promise from, her before she has been into society and seen something of the world, I——"

"I will not promise anything of the sort," cries Duke hotly. "And I think your interference is altogether unjustifiable, and that you are standing in your sister-in-law's light, for which one day she may not be disposed to thank you."

"I will take the responsibility of that," returns Lord Belhaven stiffly.

Whereupon Duke, in high dudgeon, desires that his buggy may be brought round, and quits Red Meade without even proposing to take farewell of

the ladies. He is, indeed, too hurt and angry to feel himself fit company for them.

When he is gone, Lord Belhaven is considerably exercised in his mind to know whether he has acted wisely in sending Cilla's lover about his business. After all, Duke is such a good fellow, and would probably make so excellent a husband, to say nothing of his being a brilliant match. Suppose Cilla, with the perversity of romantic young girls, should take a fancy to some good looking *vaurien*, without a shilling, who would break her heart.

How angry Dorothea will be! And Cilla! Will she thank him for his brotherly solicitude? At all events, he must tell her what has happened. So he rings the bell, and desires the servant to ask Miss St. George to be kind enough to come to him. Cilla enters with rather an embarrassed air. She conjectures well enough the subject upon which she is about to be interviewed.

"Cilla," says Lord Belhaven, taking her hand, and speaking in a tone as gentle as a woman's. "I hope, my dear little girl, that you will not be vexed with me for what I have done. You see, I am responsible for bringing you out of the schoolroom before your time, am I not?"

"Yes," answers Cilla, showing him by the expression of her eyes that she is not unmindful of what she owes him.

"In my opinion," continues Belhaven, "you are

too young yet to think about marriage. I have told Duke so. He is very angry. I hope you are not so too."

"Oh, no," replies Cilla quite eagerly.

"You would rather see a little more of the world, and of other men before you bind yourself to an irrevocable compact, would you not?"

"Yes," says Cilla. "Mr. Vereker is very kind. I—I like him very much, but——"

"But what?"

"I don't want to marry anyone."

So that was all Duke accomplished by his undue haste.

CHAPTER XIII.

THREE days have passed since Duke, angry and discomfited, shook the dust of Red Meade from his shoes. Mrs. Beauclerc is at the Court: she arrived there with her husband just in time to dress for dinner. To-morrow a fresh relay of visitors is expected: to-night the party numbers four, and is composed of the host, Angie and Captain Beauclerc, and the Honourable Cecil, commonly called Cis, Deerbrook. Duke has purposely arranged this: he wants to have Angie to himself for one evening that he may pour his complaint into her ear. For now the ice is broken, now she knows his hopes and fears, he may say unreservedly all that is in his heart: he tries even to persuade himself that she thoroughly sympathises with his new passion. Never has he been more glad to see her arrive at the Court; never has his welcome been warmer nor heartier, but it has not deceived Angie.

Dinner is over; she has left the three men; Duke has whispered to her that he will join her immediately, for the party has been too small to admit of his indulging in any confidences during dinner.

With a sad heart and a lingering eye Angie crosses the splendid trophy-hung hall and saunters down the corridor to the cosy little boudoir, where, when the party is small, guests at the Court sit in the evening. Will she ever come here again or is this her last visit? Never, since she first entered it ten years ago, has the Court possessed such a charm for her; but then, which of us values a thing thoroughly except when we first acquire or are about to lose it! To-night Angie's heart being full of pensive forebodings and regrets, she looks sadly and yearningly about her, every object being invested with a new-discovered charm. How long will it be before her doom is sealed; before she and Duke will have parted only to meet again as mere acquaintances? Some day, perhaps, he will be taught to look upon her with cold and jaundiced eyes; Duke, who once thought everything she said and did perfection. Now his heart is set on another; his eager praise, his admiration are for the sayings and doings of a stranger—small wonder that it is bitter to Angie. "What man was ever faithful!" she says cynically to herself, forgetting that she has no actual claim to Duke's fidelity—"it is only a dog who loves you with unchanged affection whether you are rich or poor, sick or well, young or old, ugly or beautiful!"

She occupies her own seat by the chimney corner; her feet are placed on her own particular

stool in front of the fire. Her eyes are closed, she leans back in her chair: so still she is one might imagine her to be wooing slumber. But her brain is busy; she sees the room and every object in it: she sees more than is actually there, for Duke is, in her fancy, sitting opposite; and, in this chair, not she but Duke's young love reclines.

The door opens briskly and her host comes in. An eager smile is on his face; a look of thorough relief and pleasure.

"Now," he says, drawing a big chair close beside her, and flinging himself into it. "Now we can have our talk."

He says it in the joyous tone of a man who has circumvented chaperons, and managed a meeting alone with his love. And a stranger would think the illusion complete, to see him catch Angie's white hand in his, and imprint a warm kiss upon it. But Angie, trying valiantly to repress the bitter feeling in her heart, is perfectly aware that she is simply a vicarious object of Duke's joy and affection. His pleasure is entirely selfish, and has no reference whatever to her. He has come to talk of himself and his passion; the two delightful themes which men never fail to inflict on a woman whom they like, and which few women would ever have the cruelty or the selfishness to inflict upon a man. Perhaps women are shrewd enough to conjecture what the result would be if they did. After five

minutes, the man would yawn, in ten he would try to change the conversation, in fifteen, if he had not succeeded, he would be gone.

Angie has by this time got herself into perfect training: there is no fear of her breaking down, or giving vent to symptoms of pique, jealousy, or disappointment, however much Duke may rave of the charms and graces, the youth and innocence of his love. She is braced to listen, nay, to listen sympathetically as long as it may please him to hold forth on that subject of inexhaustible delight and interest (to him).

She smiles. Whether her expression be counterfeit or genuine, he pauses not to ask, but plunges at once into his confidences.

"I've been dying to talk to you," he says. "I got away as soon as I could after giving Algy and Cis two of the biggest cigars I could find. They'll take an hour to smoke at least."

"But you," smiles Angie, "what will you do without yours?"

"Oh, I don't care. I can do without. It's much more to me to be able to come and talk to you than to smoke the best cigar in the world."

Angie takes the compliment for what it is worth.

"And how goes on your suit?" she asks. "Does Lord Belhaven show signs of coming round?"

Duke is very good-natured: it is rare to hear him say a word against anyone, but on this occasion

Angie's remark opens the flood-gates of his anger, and he pours forth no measured abuse of the owner of Red Meade.

"He is a pompous ass and a prig!" he cries. "What on earth business is it of his! Just simply a fussy love of interference and of showing power. What is it to him? This time last year he had never set eyes on my little darling, and now he behaves as though she were his own daughter or sister, whom he had nursed and watched over from her cradle."

"But, my dear Duke," interposes Angie gently, "you must surely admit, yourself, that there is some reason in what Lord Belhaven says. Sixteen and a half is too young for a girl to think of marriage, or to be able to make up her mind about a man."

"I don't see that at all," says Duke hotly. "In other countries, girls often marry before sixteen. And I should think she has a much better chance of happiness in liking one man and sticking to him than by frittering her heart away in a dozen flirtations, like girls in society do here. And I suppose," with rather an injured air, "there's nothing about me to make it impossible for a girl to fancy me?"

"On the contrary," returns Angie softly. "But, if your heart is so set on Miss St. George, why do you not accept Lord Belhaven's conditions for the present—say for the next six months?"

"Six months!" cries Duke. "What! to be con-

stantly in the presence of the creature you adore, and not to be able to tell her what you feel; to be always holding yourself back! It's impossible. I couldn't do it. I would not attempt it."

If he had intended to practise any reticence before Angie, he has thrown it to the winds now. It is such a comfort to have some one to talk to without reserve. And Angie, if any feeling of bitterness or mortification creeps into her heart, stifles all show of it in her face, and looks at him with the expression of interest and sympathy which he expects and demands of her.

"But," she urges, "if you do not make some concession to her brother-in-law's wishes, you will not be able to see her at all. You left Red Meade in anger, you say—if you went there again without being ready to give some such promise as Lord Belhaven requires, how can you meet him? What have you to say?"

Duke, being unable to reply to these questions, launches again into bitter invectives against Belhaven.

"You forget," says Angie presently, with a faint smile, "that you want me to see Miss St. George, and that I am anxious to meet her. How is it to be accomplished, if you do not come to terms with her guardian?"

"Ah!" utters Duke, and then he sits for some

minutes, ruminating deeply, and regarding the glowing logs on the hearth.

Angie does not interrupt him. She is pursuing her own meditations in silence. What strange changes time brings! Had she ever dreamed of or forecast this evening when she would be sitting here in this very room, listening to Duke's raptures and despair about another woman!

Before Mr. Vereker had drawn sufficient inspiration from the fire to arrive at any definite resolve, the door opened, and Captain Beauclerc and Mr. Deerbrook entered.

Angie knew by one glance at her husband's face that he had heard the story of Duke's new love: she had not broached the subject to him herself.

Mr. Deerbrook proposed a game of whist. He saw that the rest of the party were rather out of sorts, and that no one was much inclined to be genial or talkative; not even Angie, whom he had always considered the "best company in the world."

The table was set, and the game commenced. For the first time in his life, Captain Beauclerc revoked. Cis Deerbrook was the only person who remarked it.

Later, when Angie's maid was brushing her hair, her husband came in. He fidgeted about for a minute or two, and then said with some irritation,

"Does that hair-brushing business go on all night, because I have something to say to you?"

"You can go," Angie said to the maid, taking the brush herself, but she laid it down in her lap, and, leaning back against the chair, waited to hear her lord's pleasure.

"What's this I hear about Duke?" he uttered sharply, almost before the door had closed on the departing abigail. And he looked at her with a stern inquisitorial glance as though she were a criminal and he her judge. Angie resented his tone intensely—she was feeling deeply mortified and hurt already, and the one object of her life was to conceal her emotion from everyone, for what right had she to be bitter, or wounded, or angry? What right had she to the affection of any man save one, and why should it grieve her to see Duke's love diverted from her and given to another?"

So she answered very coldly and without looking at her husband,

"I do not know what you have heard."

"You know well enough, I expect," cried Captain Beauclerc with increased irritation. "He has fallen head over ears in love with this chit of a girl and wants to marry her."

"Well!" said Angie coolly, raising her eyes to his face.

"Well!" repeated Algy with exasperation. "Well! D——n it, I suppose you know that if he marries,

you've seen the last of him and are not likely to set your foot here again."

"No," said Angie quietly. "I do not suppose we shall ever come here again."

She was so hurt and bitter, more even at her husband's behaviour than at Duke's, that she was rather glad to have some one to vent her bitterness upon.

"I don't know about *we*," blustered Algy—"there's nothing to interfere with my friendship and Duke's, but you may take your oath *your* day will be over, once he gets a wife."

"Then," returned Angie, still in the same tone and eyeing him with the unflinching glance that he abhorred, "as long as you are all right, why trouble yourself about me? It is very kind of you, but you see I am not used to so much attention on your part."

Her husband stood and glared at her for a moment—then, as he made for the door, he said,

"If you let him marry, you're a greater fool than I take you for," and he marched out and banged it behind him.

Angie sat on gazing vaguely at the spot where he had lately stood. Her heart was gnawed by a bitter pain—she felt so absolutely lonely and uncared for. Of how many women with loving hearts, yearning and craving for affection is it not the doom to pass the best years of their lives lonely, uncom-

forted! They have loved once; they have been deceived—if they prize virtue and self-respect, they must evermore suffer widowhood. Was it with this intention that a Supreme Power made love the strongest need of a woman's nature that she might be made to suffer eternally through it? or will it some day be recognized that men made the laws which bind women, and made them to suit their own convenience! Now Angie felt like one cast high and dry on a barren shore. Hitherto she had not suffered so much from Algy's indifference because of Duke's devotion; now that she had lost him, there was no one to whom she could turn. A great sense of desolation swept over her; an immense craving for love and tenderness: she felt almost capable of going to Algy and saying to him, "Only show me a little kindness and affection. I will forget all the past—let us try to be something to each other!" If such a prayer would have called forth any response, she would have made it on her knees, forgetting, condoning his selfishness and neglect; but she knew that it would only be met with a sort of wondering contempt, and that she would come away more lonely, more bitter and disappointed at heart than before.

Duke was bent on this marriage—of that there was not the smallest shadow of doubt, and, in due course, all obstacles would be removed. It was absurd to suppose that Belhaven would continue to

stand in his sister-in-law's light—it was simply a question of time. If Angie had been the intriguing schemer that her enemies professed to believe her, she would have been at this moment setting to work to get all she could out of Duke before her enforced abdication from power; but she felt instead that, under these altered circumstances, it would be impossible for her to accept anything from him even for her boy.

It was with an aching heart that she sought her pillow, and her sad thoughts pursued her even into dreamland.

Duke, after mature reflection, came to the conclusion that there was nothing for it but to give in to Belhaven's "idiotic ideas." Having discussed the matter over and over again with Angie and decided that, at any cost, he *must* see Cilla, he consented to write Lord Belhaven a letter of Mrs. Beauclerc's dictation. She studied to make it seem as natural and as much in his own particular style as possible, and although he copied it from a draft she wrote, it appeared at Red Meade with three words misspelt.

"Dear Belhaven,

"I was rather put out when I left Red Meade the other day because I did not think it quite fair that you should wish to interfere between me and Miss St. George. However, as you have the whip-

hand at present, and as I would rather put up with any conditions than not see her, I have made up my mind to agree to your terms. I will not, for the next six months at all events, make any declaration or try to extract any promise from her. So I hope you will not make any objection to my going over to Red Meade pretty often. Please let me hear by return of post, and as soon as I get your answer I will drive over.

"Yours ever,

"M. VEREKER."

Belhaven was not particularly well-pleased at the receipt of this letter. When he took an idea into his head he was rather tenacious about it, and he had made up his mind that he did not want Cilla to see much of Duke at present. But he could not go back from his word, and wrote rather a cool response to the master of the Court, giving, however, the required permission for a visit. Perhaps it was rather unkind of him to show Duke's letter to Cilla, being sufficiently experienced to know that his lapses in spelling would rather grate upon her sensitive imagination and tone down any romantic feeling that she might be nursing for him in his absence. His idea was perfectly correct. Cilla received a slight shock upon perusing the letter of the individual whom she had been trying rather hard to make a hero of. But she was relieved to

think that he was bound over to abstain from these practical demonstrations of his affection which had caused her such uncomfortable sensations on the occasion of his last visit.

Duke appeared next day at Red Meade in the highest spirits, and as he faithfully kept his promise, and only showed the state of his feelings by an expressive glance now and then, Cilla was perfectly at her ease, and put him back on his pedestal; the misspelt words notwithstanding. She remembered to have heard that spelling was a gift, and that many very highly educated people were unable to acquire it.

Duke's particular object on this day was to get a promise from Lady Belhaven to drive over with her sister to lunch, in order that Angie might have an opportunity of seeing the perfect creature on whom he had bestowed his affections. Like a man, he was certain that Angie had only to see Cilla to appreciate and admire her thoroughly. But the thing was to get Lady Belhaven to come. Would it be better to tell her that Mrs. Beauclerc was at the Court, or to conceal the fact? Poor Duke was sorely puzzled on this head. If he could only get speech of his beautiful hostess alone! She looked such a pretty, soft, yielding creature, he was sure anyone could persuade her to do anything. But Belhaven stuck to them. There was no getting rid of him. How infernally suspicious he must be! As

if he (Duke) was not to be trusted after he had given his word!

"I wish you would come and shoot on Saturday," said Mr. Vereker to his host shortly before his departure, and Belhaven consented. Then Duke turned to her ladyship. "Won't you and Miss St. George drive over to lunch," he asked in a tone of entreaty, and Dorothea, who had been dreadfully bored and dull lately, responded sweetly,

"I daresay we might manage it. Is there anyone staying at the Court whom I know?"

"Algy Beauclerc and his wife," blurted out Duke, colouring in spite of himself. "I think you know them."

"Very slightly," answered Dorothea coldly, making up her mind that they would not go.

Duke remarked her altered tone with apprehension, and plunged hastily into a catalogue of his other guests, finishing with Cis Deerbrook.

Then Dorothea smiled and brightened again. She liked Cis; they used to have great fun together before she married. She forgot Mrs. Beauclerc and Cilla's prospects. Yes, decidedly they would go.

Belhaven looked a little glum. I am afraid there was something of the Turk about him, and that he would have liked to shut up his beautiful wife, and never to let another man see her. He was quite aware that jealousy was a foolish, as well as a painful disorder. He made laudable efforts to con-

quer it, and talked seriously to himself on the subject, but when he saw his lovely Dorothea smile at another man, he was apt to forget all the good advice he had given himself, and to feel unhappy and sulky.

When Duke had taken his leave, radiant at having extracted Lady Belhaven's promise, Dorothea remarked to her sister,

"You had better be on your guard against Angie Beauclerc. We are only asked over there that you may be trotted out for her benefit."

"Do not let us go then!" cried Cilla with an indignant flush.

For now that Mrs. Beauclerc occupied in her mind the place of the wicked lady of romance, she had all sorts of vague terrors and apprehensions regarding her.

"Oh," said Dorothea lightly, "you are bound to meet her some time or other. As well first as last."

CHAPTER XIV.

DUKE has made all his arrangements for the visit of the ladies of Red Meade. He cannot receive them in person because he must be with the shooting-party, especially as Belhaven is coming over early to join it. And, as he wants the old and the new love to meet and to know each other, he thinks his absence will give them a better opportunity of striking up the friendship he anticipates than his presence would do. He means, however, to slip away about half-past three in order to enjoy a few minutes at least in the presence of his young love.

He has drawn Angie aside before starting in the morning, and, squeezing her hand, said entreatingly,

"I know *you* will like her and appreciate her. Try to draw her out. I wish you could get her to sing to you, but she is so shy before people."

Angie has smiled at him in return with a well-simulated expression of cordiality. None the less she hates the task that he has imposed upon her, and wonders with some bitterness of heart why men and lovers should be so wanting in fine feeling and

perception for everyone save the object of the hour's passion.

It is not that she has conceived a prejudice against or dislike to Cilla; not that she regards the girl as a hated rival come to oust her from power: since she first heard of Duke's infatuation, she has looked upon her own loss as inevitable and has braced herself to think of it as an accomplished fact. And, being a good-hearted woman, she is not disposed to hate Cilla, nor to plot against her, but, if she could have met her alone and face to face, would have been inclined to be kind and friendly towards her, and even to look with interest for traits in her character that might seem to augur well for Duke's happiness. The real trial was that she should be compelled to meet Cilla before the eyes of the other women who were staying at the Court. They were all Angie's friends; not one of them owed her ill-will or anything but kindness, but she knew her world. She knew that in society one's friends, though they would not assist or even connive at our downfall, will watch with by no means a disagreeable sensation to see the catastrophe happen, and that their condoling and sympathetic glances are but a little civil mask to hide an unacknowledged gratification at witnessing the humiliation of one whom Fortune has once seemed to favour. And, indeed, the other four ladies at the Court who liked Angie and were her very good friends; who, moreover, but for

that circumstance would probably not have had the opportunity of enjoying Mr. Vereker's hospitality, were looking forward with the most eager interest and curiosity to see the young Esther to whom Duke had held out the sceptre; the future reigning deity of the Court whose advent would dethrone Angie and put her in a lower position than that occupied by any of themselves. They might come here under the new sovereign, but Angie, they were tolerably sure, clever as she was, would be exiled for ever. They asked themselves and each other, Did Miss St. George know about Angie? and they felt pretty certain, individually and collectively, that she did. Lady Belhaven was a thorough woman of the world, and had been a great deal in society. But, on the other hand, would she think it wise to enlighten her sister? The position was one full of interest; none of Angie's fellow-guests would have missed witnessing the meeting for worlds.

Angie would have given a great deal to be able to delegate the duties of hostess to any other member of the party on this occasion, but, in the absence of Lady Chester, the *rôle* always fell upon her. If she were absent from the room when Lady Belhaven and her sister were announced, it would look like an intentional slight: on the other hand, Angie's sensitiveness told her that Miss St. George, with the jealous prejudices of a young girl, might resent her assumption of so important a position, and promise

to herself to slight and mortify her when the time came.

Angie, however, had not learnt self-possession for nothing; if her friends surmised that she must feel uncomfortable and ill at ease there was nothing in her look or manner to indicate these disagreeable emotions—she was embroidering roses on satin and chatting gaily. Nevertheless her heart beat nervously as Lady Belhaven and Miss St. George were announced, and it was with a slightly heightened colour that she rose and went forward to meet them, feeling that every eye was upon her, bent on remarking how she comported herself.

Lady Belhaven came towards her with her sweetest smile; her most charming manner, looking so lovely that, in a moment, everyone's thoughts were diverted from Cilla to admiration of her lovely sister. Cilla was in an agony of nervousness, produced by a remark from Dorothea as the carriage rolled up the drive.

"Remember," she said, "that they will all be watching you like so many cats—of course they know all about it. And whatever you do, be on your guard against *that woman*. She will be sure to try and draw you out on purpose to ridicule and make fun of you afterwards. The less you say the better. Leave the talking to me. I flatter myself," with a complacent little smile, "that I am a match for the best of them."

To a sensitive nature like Cilla's, nothing is so terrible as ridicule; if Lady Belhaven had wished to make her sister appear at her very worst, she could not have gone to work more cleverly to accomplish her desire. As Cilla entered the Court, she felt utterly wretched, and full of dislike and fear towards Angie. Therefore, when that lady greeted her kindly and pleasantly, she merely responded in the coldest, stiffest manner, and Angie felt at once that the girl's mind had been poisoned against her.

Dorothea knew two of the other ladies, and was presented to the rest, and they were all so charmed with her that they almost forgot Cilla after a moment's contemptuous wonder what on earth Duke could see in her.

Lady Belhaven devoted herself principally to Mrs. Beauclerc, whom she treated in the most gracious and friendly, almost caressing manner. Miss Harcourt, the only unmarried lady, took possession of Cilla. That she was unmarried was her misfortune, not her fault: she had all the ideas and instincts of a young married woman of the day: all she lacked was the appendage of a husband, a want she felt and regretted sincerely, and was always on the look out to repair.

"It is so ridiculous!" she was wont to say with heart-felt earnestness, "for a woman at my age" (she was twenty-three) "to be playing the *ingénue;* to

have to be so dreadfully careful what I say and do because I am *a girl*. What chance have I without a woman's greatest attraction, a husband? This is a frightful age for girls to live in. If you amuse yourself, you get such a reputation that men won't think of marrying you, and if you try to seem quiet and innocent, they say you are 'tedious,' and don't amuse them. I shall never forgive Mamma for not *making* me marry old Sir John. I should have been a widow now, with lots of thousands a year. What if I did cry, and declare I would drown myself. She ought to have treated me like a child who wouldn't take its physic. She might have known I should thank and bless her on my knees afterwards."

"Why don't you make haste, and take out a 'flirting licence' then?" inquired one of her friends.

"Because," she retorted, "the only man who wants to marry me has no money, and every year I want more. Unfortunately, as my opportunities diminish, my wants increase."

As Miss Harcourt had only one idea in the world, society and gaiety; as the only theme upon which she cared to converse was the sayings and doings of a certain set, it may be conjectured that she found talking to Cilla rather up-hill work; Cilla, who knew nothing of society and the people who constituted it; Cilla, who was weighted besides with the fear of exciting ridicule. She blushed, stammered, answered little more than Yes and No, and

was acutely conscious that, with every moment, she was sinking deeper and deeper into the mire of her interlocutor's contempt.

Miss Harcourt was indeed making the most unflattering remarks upon her in her own mind.

"This stupid, *gauche* creature to have caught Duke," she said to herself, "when *I*, and dozens more good-looking, amusing girls have failed utterly. I always thought he was rather a fool. He doesn't seem to care for beauty. Angie is barely good-looking, but then she's awfully clever and amusing. But this oaf! How I hate those great saucer-eyes!"

The announcement of luncheon is a relief to both, and Miss Harcourt is careful to place a considerable distance between herself and Cilla at the table. No one seems very anxious for the society of Miss St. George, and she is left with a vacant chair on her right hand. She glances, half enviously, wholly admiringly at her beautiful sister, whom everyone is loading with attentions; whom everyone seems anxious to be near. She has pretty, gracious smiles and words for each person who addresses her: Angie, by whom she sits, is full of cordial admiration for her — beauty always attracts Angie. Lady Belhaven is bent on making herself agreeable to Mrs. Beauclerc, whom, in her heart, she looks upon as a wily and skilful enemy to be circumvented. The lady on Cilla's right says a few civil

words to her young neighbour, and then, for she is hungry, devotes herself entirely to her lunch.

It is nearly half over when a door immediately in front of Cilla opens and gives ingress to a man. As is only natural, being just opposite to her, his eyes meet hers, and a little flutter of pleasurable emotion traverses her heart which is rarely susceptible to impressions from gracious and comely objects. And the new arrival is pleasant and good to look at in the highest degree.

He speaks first to Angie in a voice that most agreeably salutes Cilla's sensitive ears.

"What will all you ladies say to me for breaking in upon your charmed circle? The fact is," (and here everyone sees that he is limping), "I twisted my foot a little bit, and so I thought I would come home."

Angie, always eager to alleviate suffering, makes a dozen inquiries and suggestions, but he treats the matter very lightly. By this time he has taken Dorothea's hand, and evinced with eyes and lips his pleasure at meeting her again, and it is evident that Lady Belhaven is almost equally gratified.

There are only two vacant chairs at the table; the one next Cilla and another by Miss Harcourt.

"Come and sit by me, Mr. Deerbrook," says the latter with an inviting smile, but he rejoins with a pleasant little nod, taking the seat near Cilla,

"I like to sit where I can look at you."

Cis always does exactly what suits himself, but he has a way of doing it that disarms resentment.

The moment he is seated, he turns to Cilla and says in a tone so soft and pleasing that it is almost a caress,

"I have known your sister a long time—we are quite old friends, but do you know that until a week ago I was not aware that there was such a personage as Miss St. George."

With this Cilla looks up at him, and encounters the most beautiful, expressive dark blue eyes that she has ever seen. For his part, Cis Deerbrook is equally struck with the orbs that meet his.

"I was in the school-room. I did not go out with Dorothea—with my sister," she answers, feeling much less shy at his address than she did with Miss Harcourt.

"But next year," he says with a flattering little air of interest, "you will be coming out, and we shall meet often, I hope. Tell me, how do you amuse yourself at Red Meade?"

And Cilla, whose shyness has vanished before his pleasant manner, tells him about her pug, her books, her songs in the simplest, most natural way in the world. He knows her favourite works, and he is devoted to singing; sings a little himself—perhaps some day they may have a duet together. He has heard of her voice from Duke; and here his

eyes meet hers full, and she is horribly vexed and ashamed because of the involuntary pink that flies to her transparent skin. A benevolent little smile plays about Cis Deerbrook's lips which vexes Cilla still more: it seems to say, "It is quite natural that you should blush at the sound of your lover's name." Without knowing it herself, she is resenting that he should think of Duke as her lover, or rather, as being beloved by her.

Miss Harcourt has shot several glances across the table at the pair. She is far more disgusted with Cilla now than half an hour ago, when she simply thought her a fool. "She is one of those odious creatures," she says to herself, "who have not a word to say to women, but are ready to jump down a man's throat the instant he comes into the room."

"I was at Red Meade once some years ago," Cis remarks to his young neighbour, unobservant of or indifferent to Miss Harcourt's glances. "I remember there was some charming old oak furniture there. I suppose it still exists."

"Yes," returns Cilla. "I delight in it, but Thea does not like it—she wants to persuade Granville to have modern furniture instead."

"How barbarous of her!" laughs Cis. "Fancy wanting to put modern furniture into 'ancestral halls'!"

"The chairs are not very comfortable," says Cilla apologetically.

"I wonder," remarks Mr. Deerbrook in a low voice, dismissing the subject of furniture for the moment, "whether I shall ever be asked to Red Meade again? It is a delightful old place, and now that it has two such charming ladies to heighten its attractions, I feel tremendously anxious to renew my acquaintance with it."

Two such charming ladies!

Poor little Cilla! She has not been used to these flattering speeches; to hear herself ranked with the beautiful Dorothea, except, perhaps, by Duke, whose honest admiration is expressed as awkwardly and bluntly as the blandishments of a Newfoundland dog.

But Cis possesses *par excellence* the art of saying pleasant things, and saying them in the manner that most pleases women.

For the last two or three minutes Angie has been carefully, though furtively, watching Cilla. She had not thought much of her at first; had indeed been considerably puzzled to know how or why she had attracted Duke so powerfully, but now she can realize it better. The face with the cold, stiff expression upon it which she had at first seen certainly presented nothing remarkable except the eyes which were fine in shape and colour, but now, lighted up, even to radiance, brimful of expression, quivering

with pleasure and eagerness, Angie recognized the brilliant intelligence that lay behind; guessed at the sympathetic tenderness, the sensitiveness of the girl's nature, and looked at her with a sort of melancholy interest as at one whose path must inevitably be bright with sunshine and black with tempests as the lives of highly-strung, over-sensitive people are ever wont to be.

With Duke, intelligence was everything: beauty played a second-rate part. When the fire of Cilla's eyes was kindled, Angie saw that they made all her face beautiful, and that it was a beauty much more calculated to inspire passion and devotion than any mere pink-and-white porcelain prettiness. A momentary heart-sickness crept over her: she felt old, and sad, and hopeless; yet she looked at the girl with no unkind or envious eyes. She felt, indeed, rather drawn towards her.

When, after lunch, the party adjourns to the drawing-room, Cis seats himself beside Lady Belhaven.

"Is your foot really hurt?" she asks him with some archness, seeing that his limp is scarcely perceptible.

"Not seriously, not dangerously," he answers smiling. "Shall I tell you the truth?" lowering his voice. "I wanted to see you, and so I made a pretext of tripping over a stone in order that I might

gratify my desire. You know, I have not seen you since you married and broke my heart."

It is pleasant to Dorothea to be talked to in this light strain after Belhaven's serious and rather tedious love-making. She smiles at Cis, and enters gaily on a little flirtation with him.

"Have you got it mended yet?" she laughs. "I expect it has been broken so often that it is past mending, and so you have put it up on a shelf out of the way of harm, as one does a valuable old bit of cracked china."

"How unkind of you to make fun of my sufferings!" he says with laughing eyes. "But tell me! Is your marriage a success? Is the honeymoon still going on?"

"The honeymoon!" scoffs Dorothea. "I am quite an old married woman now."

"And is life at Red Meade cheery?" inquires Cis, pursuing his catechism.

Dorothea purses up her pretty mouth.

"Cheery!" she observes. "No, I don't think you have exactly hit upon the right word. Cheery hardly expresses it. I just exist by looking forward to next season, when I shall go to London and see a few of my fellow-creatures."

"I suppose you are rather badly off for neighbours?" suggests Mr. Deerbrook.

"Rather. And then, you know, now we are in such deep mourning we cannot go out or entertain at all."

She speaks in a matter-of-fact voice. For the last month she has been able to refer, without any particular pathos, to her mother's death—it seems already such a long time ago.

Cis, who dislikes disagreeable and melancholy subjects, hastens to pass over this one.

"Should I be allowed to call at Red Meade?" he says. "Is Belhaven at all Blue Beardish? Does he want to keep you locked up? I am not at all sure that I should not, if I were he."

Dorothea laughs gaily.

"I do not know what his wishes on the subject may be," she answers. "But I know that I should be delighted to see you, for we never set eyes upon any man, except Mr. Vereker."

"Your future brother-in-law," smiles Cis.

"Hush!" says Dorothea warningly. "It is high treason to say so. Bel won't hear of it at present."

"And your sister? By the way, what lovely eyes she has! What does she say on the subject?"

"I don't think she cares one way or the other," returns Dorothea indifferently. "Of course, if I had a voice in the matter, I should insist upon the marriage taking place at once. I am afraid he may change his mind."

"He is very keen about it now," says Cis. "But do you mean to say, solemnly, that you cannot make your husband do just what you like?"

"I! certainly not."

"Then what is the use of being beautiful?" asks Cis, as though he were propounding a serious question. "I am afraid many of you lovely creatures throw away your chances when you first marry. You ought to begin by making slaves of your husbands; they would get used to their chains, and habit is very strong."

"A husband is very different from a lover," observes Dorothea tritely.

"That is because you don't go the right way to work," replies Cis. "I expect you won't take the trouble."

"Perhaps," says Dorothea lightly.

"But when may I come over to Red Meade?" asks Cis, returning to the object which he has in view.

Lady Belhaven bethinks her what a delightful change it would be from their present dulness to have Cis for a guest.

"Why not come over and stay a day or two?" she says brightly.

The moment the words have left her lips she knows she has done a rash thing. What will Bel say?

"May I?" cries Cis eagerly. "I shall be too delighted."

"When do you leave here?" asks Dorothea.

"On Tuesday. I am due at Blank Castle on that day, but I can put off my visit till Thursday."

"Do come then," says Dorothea, half elated, half frightened.

Bel will be very angry no doubt, but it will be a good opportunity of showing him that she does not intend to be treated like a child or a slave.

CHAPTER XV.

ANGIE, seeing that Lady Belhaven and Mr. Deerbrook are engrossed with each other, goes and sits beside Cilla, and tries to draw her into conversation. But Dorothea's words have had their full effect, and the girl only sees in Mrs. Beauclerc an enemy bent on turning her into ridicule. With "a fair field and no favour," Angie would have won the heart of Duke's young love in ten minutes: she was the woman of all others to charm an impressionable girl, but it is uphill work fighting against prejudice.

Cilla has never mixed with the world; is ignorant of social tact; does not know the use of a mask, and wears her heart open and unguarded on her sleeve. It is patent to all the curious eyes that are watching the pair, either openly or furtively, that Miss St. George knows "all about Angie," and that she does not mean to be deluded into any semblance of friendliness with her.

Angie, sensitive as Cilla herself, though she has all the advantage of the domino and mask which women of the world employ, is provoked at the girl's manner; at her chilling air, her trite, embar-

rassed responses. It is a relief to her when the door is thrown eagerly open, and Duke's radiant, smiling face appears. She yields her place to him, and returns to embroidering her crimson roses.

Duke, having greeted Lady Belhaven, throws himself joyfully into the chair which Angie has vacated, and begins to talk in a low, rapid voice to Cilla, devouring her meantime with his eyes. He has forgotten that he said to himself only this morning that he must be careful not to make too much of her before Mrs. Beauclerc, for fear of hurting that lady's feelings.

But ere three minutes have elapsed, he is conscious that something is wrong: somehow he cannot meet the lovely eyes in whose liquid depths he is wont to find his Heaven: her manner is *distraite* and rather cold; she seems to have very little to say to him. And all day he has been thinking about her and how he shall manage to steal away to her, and counting the hours, nay, the very minutes. A sense of disappointment creeps over him. He feels as if everyone present must remark how cold and indifferent her manner towards him is. And indeed, they do, all except Angie who keeps her eyes resolutely fixed upon her roses, and Dorothea and Cis who are quite engrossed with each other.

There is a resentful feeling in Cilla's breast She feels that a *rôle* is being thrust upon her before

all these people, a *rôle* that she has just discovered is unpleasant and repulsive to her. She is *not* Duke's property, thanks to Lord Belhaven, and she feels sincerely grateful to him at this moment: she is as free as air, and not in any way, not in the very smallest degree, bound to the master of the Court. And yet, two hours ago, she had known quite well the position she would occupy in the eyes of his guests, and had not resented it. Her eyes wander to the Greek profile, the close cut, chestnut locks of Cis Deerbrook as he sits in animated converse with her sister, and it occurs to her that Duke is heavy and not very entertaining. She has forgotten how much she liked him; how interested she had been in his talk that evening at Red Meade and the subsequent one at the Court. Then he had seemed the nicest, kindest, most delightful person in the world: she had promoted him to honour as a hero in her thoughts—to-day he was only a big, dull, homely sort of man. Why did he look at her in that masterful sort of way as if she were his property? Why did he sink his voice to those half-tones? She raises her own rather more than usual in answering him, so that everyone may be aware that she, at least, is only saying what all the world may hear. For the youngest and tenderest-hearted maid can always be cruel to the man who voluntarily places his neck beneath her little foot.

It is an immense relief to Cilla when the carriage

is announced and Lady Belhaven rises and makes her adieux.

Graceful and charming as they are, and much as everyone is prepossessed by her, it is a relief to the ladies at the Court when she has departed with her sister. The house-party always look upon the advent of strangers as a bore, especially when they engross the attention of their men.

Angie tries to slip away to her room. She has a bitter consciousness that the other women are dying to talk over Duke's fancy; to make comments on her own behaviour and conjectures as to her feelings; and she is willing enough to give them every opportunity. Indeed, all she wants is to be alone—not to think. She would be glad enough to escape from herself, too, if it were possible. But, alas! it is not. Unfortunately for her, Duke, returning from seeing his guests off, catches sight of her dress from the other end of the corridor, and flies after her up the stairs.

A charming suite of rooms, never occupied by anyone else, is set apart for her especial use—into the pretty boudoir Duke unceremoniously follows her.

"Well!" he cries eagerly—"what do you think of her?"

Once more Angie has to shroud herself in her domino and replace her mask. She tries to make both smile and voice genial.

"She has beautiful eyes, and I can quite fancy that she is clever," she responds.

"I knew you would see it," cries Duke. "You are such a good judge—you always understand people. I'm awfully glad you and she got on."

Angie hesitates a moment.

"As to getting on," she says presently, "I cannot say very much about that. There is no doubt she has been prejudiced against me, and I could scarcely induce her to speak to me."

"What an infernal shame!" exclaims Duke hotly, his thoughts at once flying to Belhaven. "But when I tell her all about you—how you've been my best friend and stuck to me all through and prevented my making a fool of myself and done everything for me, she'll get to love you, I know. Why, you're so like each other in many things, you're bound to get on."

"It does not always follow," replies Angie a little wearily. She would like to add, "And really it is a matter of perfect indifference to me what Miss St. George thinks of me," but, instead, she says,

"At all events, I feel kindly disposed towards her, and shall be always glad to be friendly if she does not make it impossible."

"Oh, that will be all right," answers Duke with a little air of authority, for, with the departure of his lady-love, his doubts and fears have vanished

too, and he feels once more as though she belonged to him. "But," returning eagerly to the charge, "you can see, can't you, that she is beautiful and clever and charming, not only a pretty doll like Lady Belhaven and the rest of them," (contemptuously), "but a creature with a heart and soul."

"Oh, yes," returns Angie, trying to put a little enthusiasm into her voice and wishing with all her might that Duke would only go away and leave her.

He drums for a moment on the table, then, looking up suddenly, says with a heightened colour and an unwonted diffidence in his strong, hearty voice,

"Do you—do you think she cares at all about me?"

"To tell you the truth," Angie answers frankly, "as soon as you came in, I devoted myself to my work—I always think it more discreet not to look at people who—who are supposed to be in love."

"I wish you had," observes Duke regretfully. "Not, perhaps, that you could have judged to-day: she was not quite like herself. I daresay all those women being there made her shy. You see, she's so very young, and she has never been into society at all."

He casts a wistful glance at Angie. She always says the right thing, and he wants her to say that of course it is natural Cilla should have been shy and anxious to hide her real feelings.

But Angie who has had a severe strain upon her to-day has no inclination to prolong the discussion, and instead of answering him goes to the window and looks out at the pale streak of red across the grey sky in the waning light.

Then it occurs to Duke as it did once before that this woman cares for him, though she has concealed it all these years, and that she suffers at the knowledge of his new love. Remorse smites him. He banishes all thought of Cilla for the moment, and, going up to Angie, says with his kindest manner,

"Are you comfortable here? Have you got everything you want? Would you like anything altered?" and she turns and answers smiling, stifling the bitter sigh that rises from her heart,

"Everything is perfect. I could not make a suggestion."

"That's all right," says Duke heartily, and takes her hand. "Remember, whatever happens, that I shall always think of you as my best and dearest friend."

She knows, if he does not, that these are but vain words, but she thanks him for them by a little pressure of the hand. After this, he releases her from his presence, and, betaking himself to the drawing-room, shyly tries his fair friends on the subject of Miss St. George. Although each in turn

assumes an air of polite interest, it is evident that not one of them has any original or flattering remark to make about his child-love: they warm to enthusiasm about her sister, but of Cilla they have nothing to remark, except, perhaps, that she has fine eyes and that she is very young.

Is it jealousy of her superiority? Duke wonders to himself. How rum women are about each other!

At dinner that evening, Cis Deerbrook sits next to Angie. He has known her for years and has the heartiest regard and liking for her as a charming, amusing woman; the dispenser of most agreeable hospitalities both of her own and Duke's. It occurs to him that a change of châtelaineship at the Court would be very much the reverse of an improvement.

Mrs. Beauclerc has an equally friendly regard for Cis: she likes him principally perhaps because he is so good to look at, and secondly, on account of his cheery manner and general talent for saying pleasant things. If she knows his weaknesses, they do not interfere with her. Are not all men selfish? handsome men super-eminently so? After all, who makes them selfish? who panders to their vanity, their love of pleasure? who laughs at and makes light of the sufferings they inflict on other women? is it not always a woman?

"Do you know," says Cis, turning his laughing eyes on Angie, "I am hatching a little conspiracy?"

"Really?" she says with an answering smile.

"I have got myself asked to Red Meade, and, though it would be much more congenial to my feelings to devote myself to Lady Belhaven, I am going to make love to the sister and try to put Duke's nose out of joint."

"Are you?" says Angie lightly. "You must be a bold man if you think you can put the nose of eighty thousand a year out of joint."

"We shall see," smiles Cis. "It is the most ridiculous mania on his part and would quite spoil him for his friends if he were allowed to carry it out."

Angie smiles. His words make not the smallest impression upon her. It is only Cis's light, jesting way of talking, and the conversation drifts off into another channel.

As the carriage rolled swiftly towards Red Meade with the sisters, each sat silently in her corner occupied with her own thoughts. Dorothea was thinking how on earth she was to tell Bel of her invitation to Cis, and Cilla was engaged in clothing all her heroes and fairy princes by turn with the presentment of Mr. Deerbrook. He was the first really handsome man to whom she had ever spoken, and he had, besides, a charm of manner which Belhaven and Duke, kind and nice as

they both were, lacked entirely. Cis had taken entire possession of the girl's thoughts: she had not one to spare for anyone else: the one grievous reflection was that it would be so long before she would see him again. Next season they would meet in London—he had said so; had hoped so. On this scanty aliment, Cilla proposed to feed her dreams for the next six months: she had forgotten for the time that there had been any question of her marrying Duke. Marriage! what a bugbear! what an odious thought! what a vulgar, prosaic ending of all sweet and pleasant things! love was the only fit theme for young hearts to dwell upon. But suppose one loved some handsome, perfect being and were beloved by him in return? Then if marriage meant being always in his presence, always looking into his eyes, and hearing the caressing tones of his harmonious voice; the commonplace word was a synonym for being in paradise.

In some such strain ran the girl's vague, unpractical, impossible ideas.

Meantime Dorothea has come to the conclusion that the best way of informing her lord of what she has done will be to tell him publicly at dinner before Cilla and the servants, as though it were the most natural thing in the world and a matter of course. She knows that, however angry he may be, he will at all events not vent his displeasure in words in the presence of his servants, and, by the

end of dinner, he will have time to cool down. So, when the fish is served, she says with her sweetest smile,

"Cis Deerbrook is coming here on Tuesday to stay till Thursday. He was going on to Blank Castle, but I persuaded him to put off his visit."

Dorothea's words produce a startling effect on her hearers: Belhaven's brow grows black as night, a joyous light leaps to Cilla's eyes and a bright flush of colour to her face which she bends over her plate to conceal.

Belhaven answers not one word. Dorothea continues to chat gaily on as though ignorant of his displeasure, and, as he preserves absolute silence, presently directs her remarks to her sister, who is quite aware of Bel's feelings and for once does not sympathise with them.

When they rise from dinner, Cilla betakes herself to her room, opens her window wide, and looks out into the starlit night. It is a habit of hers; to-night she stands longer than usual contemplating the heavens with eyes that are themselves like two bright stars.

My lord and my lady are together downstairs. Dorothea has settled herself snugly near the fire. Belhaven stands with his back to it, trying to command himself sufficiently to speak with calmness. His lips are twitching nervously; his hands are working; when

he is angry, if he is anxious to restrain himself from being violent, he assumes a tone of icy coldness. He has never been so angry before; at all events not with his wife—he does not want to frighten her nor to be brutal with her, but he means her to understand that she must never take upon herself to do again what she has done to-day.

"I understood you to say at dinner," he begins in a voice that trembles in spite of its studied coldness, "that you have asked Mr. Deerbrook over here to stay."

Dorothea throws her pretty head back and regards her lord with an amiable smile. If her heart is fluttering, she gives very much less evidence of it than Belhaven does of his emotion.

"I must tell you," he proceeds, speaking a little faster and louder as his anger will creep out, "that I am excessively annoyed and displeased at your having done so and that I must beg that you will never, under any circumstances, do such a thing again. Ask what women you please; it is for *me* to invite the men."

"Cis is such an old friend of mine," replies Dorothea lightly. "I could not do less than ask him."

Belhaven's voice, in spite of him, grows rougher and angrier.

"Cis Deerbrook is a man whom I particularly

object to. And, once for all, understand that *I will not* have men of his class hanging about *my* house. I don't intend to be one of the husbands to be laughed and jibed at whilst men" (lashing himself into a rage) "make love to my wife under my nose."

Dorothea has an excellent temper: she rarely loses it: if she does she has sufficient self-control to conceal the loss. She is of a placid disposition, with no inclination to violence or anger—she knows, besides, that the one who can keep his temper is always the victor in the long run. And you can plant your daggers in your adversary's heart with a much surer aim when your eye is steady and your hand firm. She has been perfectly aware, ever since she gave the invitation, that it will be the occasion of a struggle between her and her husband. It is very important that she should get the best of it, and she has quite arranged in her own mind what she will say and do.

Apparently unobservant of or indifferent to Belhaven's wrath, Dorothea gives a slight yawn.

"I only asked him," she says in a matter of fact voice, "because it is so deadly dull here. I thought he would be a god-send to all of us."

She has wielded her dart well—it has plunged into the very centre of the heart at which she aimed it. Belhaven is reduced for the moment to utter silence by the horrible pain of the blow. To

be insufficient to make the happiness of the creature whom he so ardently loves is a cruel thought—it is a thought he has not dared to put into words—now Dorothea has done it for him.

"I am sorry," he says after a long pause, with intense bitterness in his voice, "that you are so dull; that I bore you so much."

"It is unfortunate," agrees Dorothea with perfect coolness.

"I wish to God," cries poor Belhaven passionately, "that I had known before you married me that you did not care for me, and that you were only taking me for what I could give you."

"And I wish," returns Dorothea cruelly, but without any inflexion of anger in her voice, "that I had known you meant to keep me shut up in the country without ever seeing another man. Then, if you had been a duke with six times as much as you have, I would not have married you."

The pain is greater than Belhaven can bear. He flies away to his own room and locks himself in in the dark, leaving Dorothea triumphant, pleased with herself, and not in the very least regretful or penitent for having wounded him. Five minutes afterwards she is sleeping as peacefully and happily as a tired child—the air has made her sleepy.

Meantime, Belhaven is raging like a wounded lion. He is very sensitive: his nature is in some respects like a woman's. He begins by thinking of

all sorts of impossible things—he will go away to the furthest parts of the earth and leave this heartless woman to be happy without him—perhaps, when he is irrevocably lost to her, she will be sorry, will want him back again. Then his wrath turned on Cis. He should not enter his doors; he would write him a cold note, saying that they could not receive him. He would go off abroad at once, taking his wife and Cilla with him—he would run up to London alone and not return until Cis's visit was over.

But after an hour of anguish, wrath, and misery, during which Dorothea was sweetly sleeping, he calmed down and his old slavish adoration for his beautiful wife came creeping back—he felt there was only one thing he could not bear, to be away from her or to be on bad terms with her. He returned to the room where he had left her, ready to make any concession; desiring but one thing, reconciliation.

Cilla was in the room, but quite engrossed, apparently at least, with a book. Dorothea was asleep. Asleep, whilst he had been suffering all that agony! As he approached her she opened her eyes.

"I was in the midst of such a delightful dream," she said, and turned her face to the cushion and closed her eyes again as if to court it back.

Belhaven knelt beside her and took her hand with a hot, passionate clasp. It recalled to Dorothea

what had happened. She drew her hand coldly away from him and said,

"Pray leave me alone. I am tired."

And she went to sleep again. Cilla continued to read and Belhaven sat staring at the fire.

CHAPTER XVI.

Cis DEERBROOK'S visit to Red Meade was the cause of almost as much heart burning as the advent of the goddess

> "that uninvited came
> Into the fair Peleïan banquet-hall,
> And cast the golden fruit upon the board."

He arrived in time for dinner on the appointed day, and Belhaven, who, like most hasty-tempered people, soon calmed down again after a burst of anger, received him not only hospitably but pleasantly. And Cis had such a charming, taking manner that it was next to impossible, even for those who were most jealous and mistrustful of him, to treat him coldly.

Still, when Belhaven came down dressed for dinner, and found his wife and Cilla adorned for conquest; each having, beyond a doubt, made herself as fair as possible and bared several inches more of white skin than was customary when he was to be the only beholder (for they were in the habit of dining in high dresses because it was "so

cold in the country"), he felt a decided twinge of jealousy and his brow clouded a little. But he had been talking to himself very seriously the last day or two and had given himself the most excellent advice. He had told himself that if he wished his beautiful wife to get bored with him, and, from being bored, to grow gradually to hate him, he could not do it more successfully than by insisting on keeping her entirely to himself and away from other men, and by playing the part of Turk to her. Harem life may satisfy Eastern women who know and ask nothing better than to gossip with each other, to play with their jewels, to eat sweets and smoke *ad libitum*, and even they, we know, if they ever get the chance, will risk their lives for a little excitement of a stronger nature; but to shut up a beautiful European, accustomed to adulation, to leave her high and dry with no men (save one), "to govern in this wood," is indeed to bring down woe and misfortune on one's head.

Of this Belhaven was perfectly aware. Nevertheless, when he saw, not only his wife but Cilla, Cilla who had a mind and was not, he had imagined, the sort of girl to be taken captive by the meretricious and superficial attractions of a man like Cis, laying herself out for his admiration, he did indeed feel a severe twinge.

Unfortunately for himself (Mr. Deerbrook has

not yet appeared), Belhaven cannot resist a little sarcasm.

"What! 'cut square' on the coldest night we have had, and you London bred ladies who are always shivering at the cold in the country?"

He addresses Cilla, and she colours a little and feels a shade less fond of him than is her wont.

Dorothea answers for her with a gay little laugh.

"My dear Bel! we must make a difference for company, particularly appreciative company. It would be quite lost upon you, you know, if we cut ourselves ever so square."

"I think you, at all events, *have* cut yourself *ever so* square," he returns in a displeased voice; the Turk rising in him again as he has leisure to remark the display of Dorothea's beauty that it is gall and wormwood to him to share in company with others.

Here Cis, smiling, *débonnair*, with the slight air of languor that is so eminently becoming to him, enters, and Belhaven, making a great effort over himself, smooths his ruffled brow and tries to be pleasant. But at dinner he cannot help remarking that the four beautiful eyes of the ladies of his family are bent constantly on the guest; that they have a thousand times more light and expression in

them than usual, that, in fact, Cis makes the difference to those jewels that the light of fifty wax candles does to diamonds as compared with the glimmer of a farthing dip. Putting aside his jealousy of Dorothea, he says to himself that it is a sad pity Cilla should not have more control over her eyes and that she should evince so plainly what maiden modesty should teach her to conceal—her attraction towards Cis.

Jealousy has different phases and shows itself in different ways. Some men hate the man who attracts the woman they love—others feel comparatively little ill-feeling towards their rival, but keep all their wrath for the beloved one for whose sake they suffer torment. This was Belhaven's case—he was not angry with Cis, but he was embittered against Dorothea, and, in a much less degree, against Cilla. He had been wont to regard her beautiful eyes which mirrored her every emotion as her greatest charm—to-night he thought quite differently. It was to be hoped, he said to himself, that she would learn to control them a little better before she went into society.

When the ladies were gone, Cis showed every disposition to make himself agreeable to his host and Belhaven responded in a friendly enough spirit. He wanted to keep his guest from the drawing-room as long as possible, and Cis, in whose opinion

a good bottle of claret and a cigar balanced very evenly with the society of a pretty woman, was in no hurry to move. Besides, he was keenly alive to the importance of being on good terms with the husband of a woman whom you admire, and he did admire Dorothea amazingly. Cilla he merely regarded as a bright sort of child, different from the ordinary genus of girl, with whom, if nothing else were by, it might be amusing to play at love-making, but he had no palate for such green fruit. Between the charms of the sisters, he would no more hesitate than between a ripe peach and a green plum, and then Dorothea had what to men of Cis Deerbrook's stamp is "the married woman's greatest charm—a husband." Let not the reader, however, prepare to be shocked or to suspect villanous designs in the easy-going breast of Cis; he liked to say pretty things to pretty women; if matters ever went beyond these harmless whisperings, Cis always swore it was the woman's doing. And no doubt it was. Since Adam first threw the blame on Eve, his sons have always followed suit in their treatment of her daughters.

Pretty, placid Dorothea, hearing the deep-toned clock chime ten, roused herself and said with more petulance than it was her habit to use,

"It's too bad of Bel to keep him all this time. Of course he is doing it on purpose."

Cilla had been vainly trying to fix her wandering thoughts on her book, but she was in a state of nervous excitement, listening keenly for every sound and looking every moment at the laggard hand of the clock. Dorothea had scarcely spoken, however, when manly voices and steps were heard approaching and the two gentlemen came in.

Cis took up his position close to his hostess, and, seeing this, Belhaven rang the bell and ordered the whist-table to be set.

"It's too late for whist to-night," said Dorothea, glancing at the clock. She infinitely preferred talking to Cis to puzzling her pretty head over stupid cards, which she merely regarded as a *pis-aller*.

"There's plenty of time for a game and we are not tied to time," responded his lordship resolutely.

"I don't suppose it will amuse Mr. Deerbrook to play for our ridiculous little stakes," remarked Dorothea, making another effort.

"I will play him for what he likes," said Belhaven shortly.

Cis would far rather have sat and whispered into her ladyship's pretty little ear, but he hated anything disagreeable and never irritated a husband if he could help it. So he declared, in

his pleasant voice, that he would be delighted to play for six-pences, or sugar-plums, or love, or anything they liked, and laughed at the idea that he could not play without the excitement of gambling.

Whilst the table was being set, Dorothea took the opportunity of whispering to him,

"Don't be inveigled into shooting to-morrow. There's nothing to shoot, and I will drive you out and show you the place."

So Cis was content to bide his time, and made himself equally agreeable all round and refrained from exhibiting any particular attention to Lady Belhaven.

The husband was extremely relieved in his mind; things had passed off better than he had anticipated; no serious cause for jealousy had been given him, and he had made arrangements for the morrow by which Cis would have but little opportunity of enjoying the society of the ladies.

It is, however, as unwise to reckon without your guest as without your host, and when you have to take a lady's wishes into account as well, it is wiser not to reckon at all.

My lord and my lady had each formed a separate scheme for Mr. Deerbrook's amusement and

each had been careful not to take the other into confidence.

Her ladyship had told Cis that breakfast would be at ten o'clock. Belhaven said as he wished him good night, "Breakfast at nine-thirty, sharp."

When his lordship entered the dining-room next morning punctually at the half-hour, he found only Cilla there and no signs of breakfast except the paraphernalia.

He rang the bell sharply and asked why it was not ready.

Her ladyship had ordered breakfast to be at ten o'clock, the butler replied.

Oh! and his lordship pulled a very long face. He could not break out into a rage and say no one there had any right to give orders but himself because he was a newly-married man and had a certain respect for the decencies of life.

"Did you know of this change in the time?" he asked Cilla when the butler had retired.

"No," answered Cilla.

Belhaven ran upstairs to his wife's room two stairs at a time. He did not mean to be angry—he was only going to ask her quite pleasantly to let him know another time when she gave orders counter to his.

But when he entered and found Dorothea seated

in front of the glass whilst her maid piled up delicious little gold curls on the top of her head, and when he furthermore saw the most exquisite white silk and lace tea-gown spread over a chair evidently laid out for immediate use, his unfortunate temper came into play: the Turk cropped up again.

For Dorothea never appeared at breakfast, though he had frequently remonstrated with her on the subject and had even entreated her to grace the board with her lovely presence.

It made the day so long, she objected, if one appeared before eleven.

"Are you coming down?" he said, eminently displeased that she should have chosen this morning of all others to conform to his wishes. And, when he was displeased, his face and voice were always in harmony with his feelings.

"Yes," replied his wife sweetly. "Is it not good of me?"

"I wish," he remarked coldly, not wanting to betray himself before the maid, "that when you alter *my* arrangements you would be good enough to let me know."

"But, my dearest love," said Dorothea sweetly (she had an exasperating way of using endearments when she did not mean them and he was not in the humour for them), "you can't expect other

people to breakfast at your inhuman hour. I daresay poor Mr. Deerbrook thinks it a great hardship having to be down at ten."

To avoid getting any angrier than he already is, Belhaven makes a hasty exit. He slowly descends the stairs with a swelling heart. She would not go down to breakfast to please him, but the moment another man comes along, she not only makes her appearance, but gets up half an hour earlier to bedizen herself out for his conquest.

"What fools men are to marry!" groans Belhaven to himself, as most husbands have groaned at some time or another. "You deprive yourself of liberty and everything you value to make a woman yours, and when you have done it, she is more anybody else's than yours, in heart and inclination, at all events."

At five minutes past ten, when Belhaven has sulkily insisted on Cilla's pouring out his tea and beginning breakfast, Lady Belhaven and Cis come in together, having met on the stairs. Dorothea looks simply lovely, and Cis, like most Englishmen, is always at his best when he comes down in the morning. His attire does not betray the smallest indication of any thought of sport, and this gives further cause for dissatisfaction and uneasiness to his host.

"We start at half-past ten," he says, after the curt interchange of good mornings.

Cis gives a glance at Dorothea, who straightway answers for him.

"Oh, Mr. Deerbrook is not going to shoot. I have promised to drive him round the place this morning. Besides, he is spoiled for your shooting after Mr. Vereker's."

Belhaven is literally dumb-foundered at this daring stroke. He had cut and dried his plans so nicely for carrying Lovelace off, and some one else had been cutting and drying plans before him.

The morsel he is in the act of swallowing all but chokes him. Then, trying to stifle his rage, he says, looking at Cis,

"I can give you a pretty good day's sport. I hope you'll come."

"A thousand thanks," Cis answers in his cheeriest voice, with his pleasantest smile, "but I think I'll ask you to let me off, if you don't mind. My foot isn't quite right yet and I shall have two rather hard days' walking Friday and Saturday."

Belhaven is unable to utter a word. Cilla, who can read him like a book, is positively frightened; she feels very angry with her sister, but perhaps that is not quite all on Bel's account. Her thoughts, however, are soon distracted by Cis who devotes himself entirely to her as long as Belhaven remains in the room, and she forgets to be angry with

her sister or to sympathise with Bel when Mr. Deerbrook's handsome blue eyes are gazing into hers.

"I am going to ask you to sing to me after breakfast," he says. "I adore music and I am told you have the most charming voice in the world."

Cilla's blush and her expressive eyes betray her pleasure. Belhaven, happening to look up at the moment, receives the last feather to his load of jealous anger, and, rising abruptly, quits the room. He is in a state of intense irritation; he hardly knows how to control himself. At one moment he is minded to go to the stables and forbid the cobs to be taken out; the next he thinks seriously of interviewing his wife and telling her to choose between himself and Cis. Then he tells himself that such conduct would only beseem a fool or a madman, and, finally, he goes out shooting alone with a heart full of rage and misery and a host of mocking little demons sticking darts into his brain.

Meantime it is Cilla's hour. She is wildly, dangerously happy in the presence of Cis whom Dorothea has given up to her for the present. Cis is fond of music and has bethought him of that good turn he promised to do Angie; and as it is never the least effort to him to make love to anything that wears a petticoat, if a reasonably pretty face surmounts it, he is charming away poor Cilla's

senses, and, without any really harmful intention, making a havoc in her heart that he will never be able to repair.

She sings divinely. With such a voice and such eyes, Cis is bound to confess it is not surprising that Duke or any man should be captivated. For his own part, he finds the sleek, smooth beauty of her sister more attractive: according to his experience, when women have eyes like Cilla's there is generally a devil lurking behind them, and no doubt that heaven-sweet voice could quiver with rage as well as pathos. Cis abhors emotional women —they always give a man trouble in the long run, and he hates trouble, and indeed everything that is disagreeable. But as long as the voice is tender and sympathetic, it is charming, and for the present the eyes are neither those of a devil nor an angel, but something better still, of a woman in whom love is dawning.

Cis not being given to strong feelings, and never having suffered much for love's sake, does not pause to reflect that there is any cruelty in taking this young girl's heart by the easy assault of a few long looks and a few low-voiced words of praise and admiration.

The cobs are ordered for twelve o'clock and Dorothea has gone to equip herself.

"I should like to stop and listen to your lovely

voice for ever," murmurs Cis, and poor, ingenuous, ignorant little Cilla fancies that he means it and that he is deploring having to leave her to drive with Dorothea. "Sing me this before I go," he says, stretching out his hand to take a song from the music-stand, and, whether by chance or accident, it touches hers, and an electric thrill strikes to her heart. Oh! how different a feeling from that of fear and repulsion Duke's touch had given her! She blushes crimson, and, taking the song, hastily places it on the desk, but her voice trembles so that she can scarcely sing the first notes.

"A dangerous young lady," soliloquises Cis. "Much too inflammable. But, by Jove! what a fetching voice! Poor Duke!"

When Lady Belhaven and Cis start for their drive, Cilla watches them from the window. She stands there long after they have gone, vaguely sad and half indignant. What business has Dorothea, a married woman, to flirt—yes, it is flirting!—with another man? Poor Bel! how can he bear it? the girl wonders. How utterly wretched he must be! It is very wicked of her sister! And Mr. Deerbrook, does he not know that it is wrong too? But how could he refuse to go with his hostess, even though he would rather have stayed and listened to her songs.

Then Cilla, feeling a paw on her arm and seeing two wistful brown eyes looking up in her face, is

reminded that the pug would like his usual morning walk. So she gets her hat in obedience to his suggestion, and, absorbed in thought, strolls down the drive to the high-road.

CHAPTER XVII.

It was half-past two before Dorothea pulled her cobs up in front of the old oak door of Red Meade. For the last three-quarters of an hour (and it seemed twice as long to the watcher) Cilla had stood at the window of the morning-room waiting for the return of her sister and Mr. Deerbrook. Her heart had been torn with alternate jealousy and anxiety. Dorothea never stayed out later than two—she always wanted her luncheon. Cilla herself was too miserable to be hungry.

The pair arrived home in the highest spirits, laughing and chatting; Cilla's jealous eyes remarked that Dorothea gave both her hands to Cis in getting out.

"Lunch at once," Lady Belhaven cried to the butler, and then she came laughing in and Cilla thought it was very heartless of her to be so gay, and their mother dead only such a little while ago.

Dorothea had ordered that the luncheon should be more than usually choice and had intimated that she might be rather late in returning. She and

Cis had both something of the gourmet about them. Nice people always have, Dorothea asserted.

They had enjoyed their drive immensely; it was so delightful to my lady after her long seclusion once more to hear and to talk that delightful society jargon which is a special language to the initiated. She and Cis were in admirable *rapport* which the well-chosen lunch contributed to heighten. Her ladyship had ordered champagne because Cis always drank it and she was rather by way of liking it herself. They were so engrossed with each other that they forgot all about Cilla, and she sat there pale, wretched, unable to eat because of a terrible choking sensation in her throat; her poor little heart swelling with jealousy, anger, and misery.

She thought the other two would never leave off eating; when lunch ought to have been over, there was still *foie gras* and *caviare* to be dallied with, then liqueurs, and after this, was it possible! cake and grapes. And then, crowning infamy! Dorothea begged Cis to light his cigarette, and he at once joyfully obeyed.

Cilla did not know that it was the custom of fashionable men to smoke after luncheon in the presence of fashionable ladies; Belhaven never smoked in the dining-room when they were there—it seemed an unpardonable familiarity in the girl's eyes. She did not pause to analyse her feelings nor to reflect

that her anger was on Dorothea's account. Cis exercised such a spell over her sensitive, passionate young heart that it is probable if he had appealed to her and pressed her to smoke a cigarette herself to please him she would have consented. But neither of them took the smallest notice of her; they were entirely engrossed with each other, and, when Cis lighted his cigarette, she rose to leave the table. He went and opened the door for her with joyful alacrity, and poor Cilla read but too accurately the expression of his face.

"There is no doubt," he said, returning to his chair and drawing it a couple of feet nearer to that of his hostess, "that two is a better number than three."

"Yes," responded Dorothea heartily. "And girls are such a bore. One can never talk before them."

And then they laugh and chat on, and Cis tells her a thousand amusing little stories and *chroniques scandaleuses* which no one can tell so well nor so delicately as himself. A word, a pause, a gesture, and he can convey everything he desires without shocking the most delicately-balanced susceptibilities.

Lady Belhaven has not been so happy nor so much amused since she married; time flies without either remarking it; four o'clock strikes—still they sit on in the dining-room and Cis has reached his third cigarette.

The butler comes in and puts on fresh logs, and a great blaze roars up the chimney. This, as it happens, is unfortunate. It has grown nearly dark outside, and, at this moment, Belhaven passes the window on his return from his day's shooting. The long walk has done him good; has braced his nerves and toned down his anger. He has told himself that he must not be unreasonable; that he must be content to pay the penalty attached to having a beautiful wife. Of course other men will admire her, and, of course, being a woman, she will love admiration and court it. That weakness is the peculiarity of the sex and order to which she belongs. He will make a supreme effort to conquer his sullenness and meet them all with a cheerful countenance and as pleasant a voice as he can command. He is smoothing his brow at the moment of passing the dining-room window, when lo! a vision meets his gaze that sends his resolutions to the winds and fills him with a fury to which the morning's anger had been mere child's play.

It was an interior that a painter would have looked at with delight—the firelight throwing a ruddy glow over the draperies, the pictures on the wall, the silver and glass, the fruit and flowers. Belhaven saw none of these. What he did see was Cis with one elbow on the table sitting familiarly near to his wife; looking into her face and *smoking!* a champagne bottle at his elbow.

This accursed saturnalia was being held under his roof: his bride of five months was behaving with this unbridled licence, apparently forgetful of his very existence.

He turned away and went into the gun-room in a state bordering on frenzy that was presently succeeded by a sort of stupor. He sat on there in the dark for perhaps an hour—then the door opened and Dorothea's gay voice called,

"Bel! Bel! where are you?"

He held his breath and did not answer. He could have struck her or strangled her, but he could not speak to her in an ordinary voice.

"I wonder where he is," she said, and then went away and shut the door.

She had inquired of the servants when they brought in tea and had ascertained that his lordship had come in, and, feeling rather guilty in her conscience, had been to look for him with the intention of behaving with great wifely tenderness and solicitude towards him. Not finding him in the gun-room, she went to the library and thence to his dressing-room.

Meeting Cilla on the stairs she asked where Bel was and Cilla answered coldly that she had not seen him. Dorothea, not generally very acute in her perceptions, noticed that there was something unusual in her sister's voice.

"Go and pour out the tea, dear," she said sweetly.

"I don't suppose I am wanted," replied the girl in a tone of intense bitterness.

Dorothea looked at her with a petrified stare. Then she said, in a displeased voice,

"Are you out of your senses! Please do as I ask you at once!"

Cilla felt the strongest inclination to rebel, but she could not resist the fascination of being in Mr. Deerbrook's presence. So she obeyed.

Cis greeted her with his most charming smile. He saw that she was angry and hurt, and, as he hated anything unpleasant, he exerted himself to soothe her ruffled feelings.

"Why did you run away and where have you been all this long time?" he said, and poor Cilla, who was like clay in his hands, seeing the soft expression of his deep-coloured eyes and hearing the tender inflexion of his voice, was beguiled in a moment from her anger and felt, instead, a glow of rapture thrill through her heart.

When Dorothea came back after her fruitless search and they had finished tea, she proposed an adjournment to the billiard-room from which she sent a message to her husband requesting him to join them there.

But, though she sent a second time, Belhaven came not, and Dorothea felt an uneasy conviction that he was still angry with her for taking Cis driving. She little guessed how his wrath had been augmented by later events. Cis, to whom jealous husbands were not an unknown genus, had a pretty shrewd idea that something was wrong and began to devote himself to Cilla, so that when Belhaven should appear it might not seem to the girl or to him as a *rôle* suddenly assumed, and Dorothea, quite understanding his motive, neither showed nor felt any displeasure at the transfer of his attentions. She was rather absorbed too with meditations how to appease Bel's wrath.

When she went upstairs to dress for dinner she again paid a visit to his dressing-room, and this time she found her lord. Instead of advancing eagerly to embrace her as was his custom; he stared coldly at her as though he would ask the reason of her intrusion.

"Where have you been?" she cried gaily, though her heart quaked a little. "I sent for you twice."

He did not so much as answer her. Indeed he could not, for a terrible fear seized him lest if he once opened his lips it would be like unbarring the flood-gates.

"What is the matter? Are you cross with me?"

she said coaxingly, and, going up to him, she laid a hand on his arm. He shook her off as if she had been a serpent.

"Please go," he uttered in a smothered voice, and pointed towards the door.

"Oh, very well," returned Dorothea, nettled at such treatment, and, with that, she left him. What did she care, she said to herself with a toss of her head. If he chose to put himself in a temper for nothing, he must do it. She certainly would not crouch to him like a whipped spaniel nor let him think she was afraid of him. This was their first struggle; this, then, was the time to show her independence. So, during dinner, she made herself more charming than ever to Cis, who, for his own part, wished devoutly that women had a little more discretion and would not run such silly risks when there was nothing on earth to be gained by them. It was like burning your house over your head for the fun of making a blaze, but most women were like that, he reflected. He devoted himself chiefly to Cilla at dinner, but Belhaven, sitting morose and glum, saw through this manœuvre or thought he did. He saw, moreover, that Cis, in his indolent vanity, was turning the poor child's head. And now for the first time he repented him sorely of having put a spoke in Duke's wheel and realised that the Scylla from which he had thought to save her was as nothing compared with the Charybdis

into which she might fall. Cis meant nothing. God forbid that he should! What could he bring to a girl like Cilla but heart-burning and misery? Duke, by comparison, was a rock to lean upon, and Cis like shifting sands. Belhaven, a prey to regret and assailed by miserable thoughts, could scarcely eat his dinner. Cis found him very poor company after the ladies had gone although he made supreme efforts to get him to talk. It was not long before they adjourned to the drawing-room.

"Shall we have our game of whist?" inquired Dorothea, all the more sweet and smiling to make up for her husband's lowering brows.

"No," replied Belhaven curtly. "I don't care to play."

No matter what she had proposed, he would have negatived it to-night, angry and embittered as he was against her.

"Then," said her ladyship, turning to Cis, "you and I will play écarté. I adore écarté. I like it far better than whist. And," with an expression of childish glee, "we will have a little gamble. Ring the bell, please." When the servant came she bade him ask her maid for her purse.

Belhaven disapproved of women gambling, and when he saw the pair sit down to play, he experienced a horrible conviction that he had been fulfilling the vulgar old proverb, and cutting off his nose to spite his face.

For some minutes he stood, as his habit was when vexed, staring into the fire; then he turned and glanced at Cilla. She had taken up a book and was pretending to read—her face was hidden behind it, but he could see that the hands which held it trembled. Then he glanced at the two handsome, smiling people sitting opposite to each other and cursed them for their heartless vanity and selfishness, which made them callous to the pain they were inflicting. He did not add any anathema upon his own folly and Cilla's for nursing this jealous anguish, as he might have done with very good reason.

Presently he approached his sister-in-law and proposed a game of chess—it was a favourite amusement with both. She acquiesced and he fetched the board and set the men. But before five minutes had elapsed both would have been devoutly thankful to throw up the game.

Everyone knows that chess requires the exercise of all the intelligence that the player possesses, a cool head and an attentive mind. As, however, the hearts of these two poor people were rent with jealousy; as they could not keep their eyes from occasional glances at the other pair nor their ears from straining to catch what the écarté players were saying, the result was that each made the most unskilful and ill-considered moves, whilst the other,

even if he remarked it, did not care to set his adversary right.

Cilla, with trembling hands, marble feet, and a little red patch on either white cheek, was wondering dumbly how Belhaven could allow her sister to behave in this manner. She half dreaded, half longed for him to make a scene and punish the wicked offender on the spot. And Belhaven, over and above his own wrath and pain, was stricken with regret and perplexity as he looked at the child's white face; the hunted expression of her eyes, her parched and burning lips.

"What was to become of her if she was made of such inflammable stuff as this?"

He wished that he had not taken compassion on her and rescued her from her governess; that he had let Duke make his declaration (how he would open his arms to Duke as a suitor now!), that—but here Dorothea's *rire perlé* fell upon his ear, and, involuntarily, he glanced at her. Her beautiful bare white arms were on the table, her jewelled fingers supported her dimpled chin; she was looking over at Cis, who bent slightly towards her, with an expression of provoking coquetry in her blue eyes. Belhaven rose abruptly and left the room. Cilla, after one frightened movement, resumed her book and hid her face behind it. She did not even remark that she was holding it upside down. Her

heart was full of hatred and bitterness. For several months no angry emotion had ruffled her breast, but now the demon of rage and anger that had possessed her in the Fräulein's days seemed to have returned, bringing with him seven spirits worse than himself. To-night she felt that she hated her sister far more than she had ever hated her governess, and, because she had right principles and a good heart, she was shocked and horrified at herself and the terrible feelings which had gained the mastery over her.

Dorothea was enjoying a delightful evening—she had almost forgotten the existence of the other pair —she was glad when Belhaven took himself off and that he forbore to return. But retribution was in store for her.

I will not presume to enter the marital chamber nor to describe the terrible scene which took place there on that December midnight. Belhaven did not smother his Desdemona, though the snowy, lace-fringed pillows were conveniently and invitingly handy, but he exhibited such passion and said such dreadful things that his bride was terribly frightened and remained sobbing and hysterical for quite half an hour after he left her. As for Belhaven, his heart was a literal hell of conflicting passions. He was enraged against Dorothea: he cursed his own brutality: at one moment he hated her almost to madness; at the next he would fain have grovelled at

her feet and besought her forgiveness. Now she was a Lamia, a serpent, a she-devil; again he only remembered that she was an exquisitely beautiful woman whom he agonised to clasp to his breast and cover with a torrent of kisses. He went through all the phases of that worst madness, jealousy; the hate, love, loathing, passion which are its alternate stages. When his fury had expended itself, heart-hunger came in its place; although he knew that his anger had been just if excessive, he was ready to fall at her feet and declare himself a brute, a wretch, a monster and to implore her forgiveness in the most abject terms. Only once more to fold her beautiful form in his arms, to press his lips to her fair beloved face; the desire became a madness. Softly and stealthily he crept from his room in the darkness and tried the handle of his wife's door. But her ladyship had already taken one step towards revenge and had locked herself in.

"Dorothea!" he murmured softly. "Dorothea! My own darling!"

But whether Dorothea heard him or not, I know not; no answer came to his appeal, no sound from within fell upon his keenly listening ear. Then his love turned to wrath again; he went back to his own room and spent the night watches in weary pacings to and fro in company with his miserable reflections. What a terrible future awaited him if already in the first blush of their married life his wife evinced such

pleasure in the society of another man; acted with such indiscretion before her servants!

Poor little Cilla in her dainty pink-hung chamber was spending as miserable a night as her brother-in-law.

People may laugh at the suffering and the passion of a love-sick girl not yet seventeen, but indeed it is no laughing matter. Pshaw! to fall in love at first sight with a man who has given her no encouragement to speak of. If she is distraught with grief and passion, she must be a shameless, immodest creature with an ill-regulated, not to say depraved, mind. But the passion of a young girl of Cilla's temperament is as pure and innocent as it is violent: its food is a look, a hand-pressure; a tender word, a flower for a keep-sake. If anyone disputes or jeers at this absolute truth, it is because of the coarseness of his own mind. And it is a fact, unrecognised though it may be, that the love of women in general is far more sentimental and sympathy-craving than sensual.

All through her short life, Cilla had been yearning for love—in default of it, she had fed her heart and imagination with romances and had lived amongst ideal heroes and ideal passions. She was budding into womanhood; she had never until the last few months heard a word of love uttered nor seen passion in a man's eyes—her heart was open to receive

the first master who should touch and please it. And what kind of man was likely to attract a girl whose ideas had been moulded from the heroes of novels and romances? Was it a man blunt, straightforward, matter of fact such as Duke, or a man of remarkably handsome exterior like Cis, versed in all the arts of pleasing women; whose look was a caress, whose voice was a harmony. And Cis had taken captive many quite experienced feminine hearts whilst poor little Cilla was not even yet at her ABC of knowledge of the world and of the ways of men. And do not people invariably in books fall in love at first sight?—and sometimes out of them too?

The cause of all these terribly heartburnings at Red Meade slept peacefully and dreamlessly from the moment he put his head on the pillow until his servant called him next morning; and descended as cheery, *débonnair* and smiling to breakfast as was his wont. He could not fail to remark the paleness both of Belhaven and Cilla, and when he found that his hostess was not coming down to breakfast surmised that there had been "the devil to pay." He was going at half-past eleven, a circumstance for which he was cheerfully thankful—he hated rows.

Belhaven, feeling a little ashamed of himself as people who have hasty tempers and give way to them invariably do, even though they do not confess

it, exerted himself to be civil and to talk to the "parting guest" whom he was about so joyfully to "speed," and Cis seconded him with perfect good humour. He begged Cilla to let him hear her lovely voice again before he went.

In the three quarters of an hour that the two spent alone together, he contrived to make Cilla forget that he had flirted with Dorothea and to inspire the belief in her foolish heart that he was very seriously attracted towards herself. If the poor child's vanity comes in for censure, it must be remembered that she had already made the indisputable conquest of so important a personage as Mr. Vereker and had thus been inspired with some little confidence in her powers of pleasing.

"I shall look forward ever so to meeting you in town," Cis says with a melting glance from his dark blue eyes, and holds her hand twice as long as he need. "I shall send you those songs I spoke of the moment I get to London. Think of me when you sing them, will you?"

"Time to be off," cries Belhaven, putting his head in at the door, and with one last look and pressure and an answering look from Cilla's beautiful eyes that shamelessly betray her heart's sweet secret, Cis is gone.

And the girl with radiant eyes and a faint flush like the colour in the heart of a shell on her cream-

white cheeks throws herself into the big chair by the fire and forgets the world and time and space in the most heavenly day-dream that has ever visited her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"I CAN'T keep away any longer," said Duke on the afternoon of the day on which Mr. Deerbrook left Red Meade. "I must go and see my little girl."

He had sought Angie in her boudoir and was pacing up and down the room in a restless, feverish mood.

"Why not?" she answered tranquilly. "There is nothing to keep you here to-morrow."

"I think I will go," he said. "Only Bel always makes it so infernally unpleasant for me and looks as if I had no business there. It's awfully disagreeable going anywhere that you feel you are not welcome."

"But if Miss St. George is pleased to see you, is not that enough?"

"Ah!" said Duke. And then he took two or three turns in silence, wondering whether Cilla would be pleased to see him. "If I knew," he went on, wistfully, looking to Angie for comfort. "*If I knew* that she cared for me, I shouldn't mind two straws whether Bel was pleased or not. What do you think

now? Would she," diffidently, "have given you at all the idea that she cared for me, just the least little bit?"

He put the question in as pleading a tone as though he were asking for a portion of Angie's favour.

"I told you, my dear," she answered, "I did not look at you. I always think it indiscreet to watch lovers" (with a little, bitter intonation on the last word).

Duke caught it. He was more sensitive now that he was so much in love.

"You know," he said, stopping before her and speaking almost apologetically. "You know how devoted I was to you—you know if I could have married you years ago, how gladly I would have done it. I should never have thought of another woman nor looked at one if you had been my wife, but a fellow can't go on for ever without caring for some one who can be something to him in return."

"My dear boy," said Angie with some coldness, "why do you talk in that way? Have I given you any reason to think I am jealous?"

She opened her large dark eyes and fixed them on his face.

"No, no, of course not," he cried, disconcerted and confused. "I was only saying what was a fact. I did care awfully for you. I would have given my soul for you once."

"Well," she answered with a hard little laugh, "let us be thankful that your soul is no longer in peril; at all events on my account. Good Heavens!" with latent irritation: "to hear the generous way in which men talk of giving their souls—that means eternity—when they cannot devote their bodies for more than a few months at a time!"

"Can they not?" cried Duke. "I swear—"

"Do not swear!" and Angie changed her mood and laughed. "It is not worth while. We were talking about your going to Red Meade. I will amuse your party—if it is fine and bright like to-day, we might drive over to the White House, take our lunch with us and get back before dark."

"What an angel you are!" cried Duke, with the fervour that a man feels for a woman when she does what he wants, and makes things smooth for him.

So the next day saw Mr. Vereker *en route* for Red Meade—he always drove the fastest horse in his stables when he went in that direction.

It was with an emotion quite apart from pleasure that, as he turned into the gates, he saw Belhaven coming down the drive with his gun over his shoulder.

"If I had been five minutes later!" he thought, and then pulled up to greet his, as he imagined, reluctant host.

But on this occasion, Belhaven, instead of giving him a cold greeting, was almost cordial.

"I'll walk back to the house with you if you'll get out," he said, and Duke gave the reins to the groom and jumped down.

There was rather an awkward pause for a moment after the man had driven off. Duke was wondering at this unexpected cordiality and Belhaven was trying to make up his mind whether to speak about Cilla or not. He had thought a great deal about her this morning, for there had been a grand reconciliation between him and Dorothea, after which he had forgotten his own pangs and grievances and found himself at liberty to think of other subjects. He was very much puzzled about Cilla and what to do with her; he had a vague idea that the only way to make her heart safe was to tie it up to something strong as you would chain up a dangerous dog. He forgot his former sensible theories about her—his one idea was to keep her from making a goose of herself about Cis. Now the safest plan, though it is not always infallible, is to put yourself in the place of the person for whom you wish to act. If Belhaven had only said to himself, "Suppose I were offered all the most beautiful women in the world instead of Dorothea, would I hesitate for a moment between her and them?" But he was foolish enough to think it quite possible that Cilla being "only a child who did not know her own mind," might be able to satisfy herself with Duke in default of Cis. He did not know how far more

abhorrent to a young girl is the thought of any other man as a lover than the one whom her fancy has lighted on than it could possibly be to him—at all events there was a chance, he said to himself. If Duke made love to her, she might look upon him in a new light. Belhaven was of course ignorant of Duke's attempt and its disastrous failure. After a moment of doubt he rushed at his subject.

"My dear old chap," he said, turning with considerable cordiality to Duke, "I've been thinking a good deal about you and Cilla, and, do you know, I am not sure that I was right after all in placing restrictions upon you."

Duke's every pulse throbbed with a great and sudden joy. "Of course," Belhaven continued, seeing the light that leaped to Duke's eyes, "I still stick to what I said about marriage being out of the question for a long time to come, but I do not think there could be any great harm in your speaking to her."

Duke grasped his hand—he could hardly speak for the strength of his emotions. A sudden joyful thought smote him that Belhaven had discovered that Cilla cared for him—he could not rest until he made it a certainty.

"What has made you change your mind?" he cried eagerly turning to look into his friend's face.

Then it occurred to Belhaven that it would be just as well to put Duke on his guard.

"Well, you see," he answered not without hesitation, "she is such a child—she knows nothing of the world—she is almost in the power of—of any man who chose to make a fool of her." Then, as he sees Duke's astonished face, he hastens to add, "You know, Cis Deerbrook has been over here, making love to her and——"

Duke turned very white.

"That was a blackguard trick of his when he knew I loved her," he said. "Why I thought——"

He recollected himself and paused.

"It was your wife he was after," he had been going to say, but Belhaven knew just as well as though the words had been spoken.

"I don't mean to say," he answered, "that he told her he loved her in so many words, but you know that d—nable way of his that he can't be five minutes with a woman without making her think he's in love with her. Not that I know," proceeded Belhaven hastily, "that she thinks anything about him. I don't understand girls; I never had anything to do with one before. But I know she has high principles and I think that if you could only get her to give you a promise——"

Belhaven hesitated. Even as he spoke, it flashed across him that the advice he was giving

Duke was unsound and that this hasty and ill-considered measure stood a very poor chance of success. But, at this moment, Cilla appeared in the distance with her pug trotting beside her.

"Here she is," said Belhaven. "We will turn and walk with her. When we get into the wood, I will leave you two together, and, in an hour's time, I shall be back in my room in case you have anything to tell me."

Cilla smiled frankly at Duke and gave him her hand. The sight of him excited no feeling of any sort in her breast; her thoughts being quite full of Cis, she did not trouble her head about any other man. And as Belhaven had arranged that Mr. Vereker was not to pay her any lover-like attentions, she felt quite secure and unembarrassed. Had she been less pre-occupied, she might have remarked how nervous and ill at ease Duke seemed, and that most of the conversation fell to herself and her brother-in-law.

They arrived at the wood, and, presently, when they reached a place where a narrow path led off, Belhaven said,

"I'll leave you here. I think I shall get a couple of hares. See you at lunch," and he was off.

Duke and Cilla pursued their way; Cilla talking with tolerable unconcern, Duke with a knot in his throat and an unusual trembling of his strong hands.

This pale, dark-eyed young girl made him feel like a schoolboy; but then on her fiat there lay so much joy or misery.

"Won't you rest here a moment?" he said suddenly as they came to a wooden bench, and there was something so strange in his voice that Cilla looked up quickly.

With that swift glance a sudden intuition came to her of what was going to happen, and she shut up her heart against him with the cold and bitter feeling that even the softest-hearted women have for a man who makes love to them against their will when they care for another.

"No," she said coldly. "I am not tired; I would rather walk."

Duke stopped dead short.

"I want to speak to you. I have something to say to you," he uttered in a quick, nervous tone.

"Do not say it," she said, her heart standing still, and she hurried on. With a couple of strides he overtook her.

"Why do you run away from me?" he cried. "I must speak. Won't you listen to me?"

"No, no," she answered, and the swift colour rushed to her face.

"You must and shall hear me," cried poor Duke quite beside himself. "If you only knew how I love you!"

Cilla, tender-hearted as she was, was not a bit sorry for him. Women, as far as I know, never have any compassion as long as the unwelcome suitor is in their presence.

"I do not want to know," she returned almost impatiently. "I cannot help it. I am very sorry."

"Do you hate me then?" he said in a melancholy voice, incapable of understanding anything but extremes at this moment.

"Hate you!" echoed Cilla. "No, certainly not. I like you very much." But her tone did not convey the idea of any great partiality.

"I don't want you to *like* me," he said miserably. "*Like* is a poor, wretched word. You may *like* anybody and everybody. What I want is your love."

"It is no use," said Cilla desperately. "I told you not to speak to me. I cannot love you. I know I never should."

"Why!" asked Duke. And then a bitter rankling thought of Cis and his treachery came into his heart and he said,

"Is it because you care for some one else? is it because Deerbrook, my own friend, who knew that I loved you, has been trying to get you away from me?"

A flood of crimson rushed to Cilla's brow and throat. She had imagined her secret was all her

own—she was ready to die of shame at the thought that she was discovered. Then her shame turned to bitterest resentment.

"I do not understand you," she cried with a look in her eyes that would have given an impartial observer the notion that she had a pretty temper of her own. "Do you mean to insult me? Is that what you came for?"

Duke ought to have taken warning, but he was so wretched he grew reckless.

"You don't know Cis," he said rashly, "he is like that with every woman—he has no more idea of marrying you than of flying—he could not even if he wanted to—he is head over ears in debt."

Tears came into Cilla's eyes, but they were not tears of grief but rage—she could not even find words to vent her wrath.

"Whilst I," proceeded Duke, rushing on his destruction, "love you with all my soul. All that I have is yours. I can give you everything your heart could want."

Then the tender-hearted and sympathetic Cilla found her tongue.

"Do you think," she cried, glaring upon him like a young pythoness, "that I care for your money? I suppose you fancy you can *buy* anybody. But," with superb scorn, "if you had fifty times as much it would be all the same to me. I would not marry you."

After this, one might have thought there was not much more for Duke to say. But he had the true British courage that never knows when it is beaten.

"Don't say that for God's sake!" he entreated. "Let me hope. If you don't love me now, perhaps some day when you see how faithful and devoted I am" (here Cilla was momentarily softened, but unluckily he continued): "when you have found out that Cis is only playing with you, you may come to care for me."

"Never!" cried the girl with vindictive energy —"never." Then she stopped dead short. "Which way are you going?" she said, "because I will go the other. I hope I shall never see you again. If you are a gentleman, you will not attempt to come near me ever again."

Then Duke realised that he had got his *congé*. He stared at her in a sort of dazed, broken-hearted way, and then stood still whilst she walked away with her head in the air and the pug, his gift, trotting gaily at her heels. He went and leaned with his back against a tree. The winter sun was shining through the branches on the dead leaves, dead as his hopes; but everything looked ashen grey to him; a deathly cold seemed to have nipped his heart. It crossed his mind with a bitter irony that he was the rich Mr. Vereker, the Sultan before whom so

many lovely and proud damsels had knelt, waiting for him to throw the handkerchief. And this young girl had flouted and disdained him, and laughed to scorn his riches and his gifts.

But even whilst his heart was bitter within him, he said with a chivalrous love and respect of her, "God bless her! She is not like the rest of them. She would not take me for what I have!"

Presently he heard a shot close by and then the crashing of the leaves and branches under Belhaven's retriever.

"Hullo there!" cried the master of Red Meade a moment later. "By Jove, Duke! I might have shot you!"

"I wish to God you had!" said poor Duke and then Belhaven knew what he had strongly suspected before that he had been guilty of a serious error of judgment.

"Don't take it to heart!" he said cheerily laying a kind hand on the other's shoulder. It is so easy to look on the bright side of our friends' misfortunes. "She's only a child. There's plenty of time for her to change her mind."

"Why did you ask Cis over?" cried Duke reproachfully. "You might have known."

Belhaven did not answer his remark. He could not bear to confess that Dorothea had given the invitation without consulting him.

"Did Cilla say she cared for him?" he asked.

"No," Duke answered. "But she was furious with me for saying that he meant nothing."

"It was a pity you brought his name in," said Belhaven, knitting his brows.

"Yes," agreed Duke dolefully, "it was. She left me in a rage. I am never to see nor speak to her again."

"Oh!" said Belhaven authoritatively, "that is humbug. She'll have to see and speak to any friend of mine whom I choose to ask."

"I don't want any persecution on my account," uttered Duke mournfully. "No! I shan't trouble her any more. I wish I hadn't come to-day. Perhaps if she had had a week or two to get over thinking of him I might have had a better chance."

"Perhaps," agreed Belhaven feeling anything but pleased with his own share of the transaction. "One can only do what one thinks is for the best."

"Of course, of course," answered Duke. "You have behaved awfully well and kindly to me. I shan't forget it," and he grasped Belhaven's hand. "Well! now there is only one thing for me to do—to get away. I'll go and order my trap."

"Stop and lunch first," said his host.

Duke made a gesture as though to say he never wished to taste food again. Then the two men walked together towards the house with doleful countenances.

It was rather hard on Duke's groom that because his master's suit was unsuccessful, he should be suddenly torn from the delicious sirloin of beef of which he had only eaten two mouthfuls. But when he received the imperative message that he was wanted immediately, there was nothing for it but to obey. He couldn't see why if folks was in love they shouldn't want their victuals all the same, and as he sat sadly with folded arms beside his master in the buggy, he called to mind how the very day he discovered his Sarah embracing the footman behind the pantry-door, he made as good a dinner as ever he did in his life off a roast leg of pork.

For of course he knew that his master had been crossed in love, as masters, however unintentionally, have no secrets from their servants.

Duke wanted Angie. His first question on reaching home was whether she had returned and he was bitterly disappointed at being answered in the negative though he knew of the proposed picnic. Why were people always out of the way when you wanted them! But if Cilla had smiled upon him, he would hardly have been aware at this moment that such a person as Angie existed. He went and shut himself in his room having given orders that he was to be instantly apprised of her return. How he longed for her! How his heart smote him, now that he was suffering, for his thoughtless conduct to her. He longed for her soft sympathetic voice, for

the touch of her cool hand as a man suffering physical agony longs for an anodyne. He knew that tender heart: *she* would not triumph over him nor rejoice secretly because of his sufferings even though he had behaved selfishly to her.

END OF VOL. I.

PRINTING OFFICE OF THE PUBLISHER.

COLLECTION

OF

BRITISH AUTHORS

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 2040.

MY LORD AND MY LADY BY MRS. FORRESTER.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

MY

LORD AND MY LADY

BY

MRS. FORRESTER,

AUTHOR OF "VIVA," "ROY AND VIOLA," ETC.

COPYRIGHT EDITION.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1882.

The Right of Translation is reserved.

MY LORD AND MY LADY.

CHAPTER I.

ANGIE had accepted her fate and resigned herself to it. She had a courageous spirit and the moment she believed a thing to be inevitable, made no attempt to struggle against it. Disappointment was the motto of life she told herself. She was even frightened when things seemed to go too smoothly, as Polycrates was frightened when he saw his ring come back to him from the sea. There was always a reverse to the medallion. She knew that she was to be deposed from her sovereignty over Duke's heart and possessions and she prepared to abdicate with dignity.

"How well she takes it! What a wonderful actress she is!" the other women at the Court said to each other with something of the admiration that Red Indians may feel when they see their victim endure his tortures without making a sign. But,

truth to tell, Angie was not suffering a tenth part of what they imagined.

She was as bright and full of tact as ever on this day when Duke had gone over so blithely to see his young love: (everyone knew where and why he was gone): and the picnic at the White House was quite a success. Fresh air was life to Angie as it is to all nervous, highly-strung women and she felt quite invigorated by her drive home through the keen crisp air.

As she crossed the threshold, the butler said to her in a low respectful whisper that Mr. Vereker had wished to be told the moment she returned.

Angie's heart beat a little faster; she was particularly subject to those vague fears that assail poor mortals when something unusual or unexpected happens.

"Where is Mr. Vereker?" she asked, and on being told that he was in his own room, she hastened there at once. Had Miss St. George expressed jealousy of her? had she begun to exercise her power already by demanding Angie's dismissal from the Court? was Duke going to break the unpleasant news to her?

There was a dangerous flash in Angie's eyes; an involuntary stiffening of her backbone as she turned the handle of the door braced for dignified action, but one glance at Duke's face told her what

had happened and the flash died away into tender solicitude.

He comes towards her and takes her hands.

"It is all over, all over," he says in an agitated voice. "My heart is broken. I shall never get over it."

"What has happened?" Angie asks with the kindest, softest expression in her eyes and without the smallest sign of triumph, which indeed she is far from feeling. To see anyone suffer is to invoke her compassion at once; if her worst enemy were in grief or pain she would be constrained to try and mitigate his anguish.

"Cis has been there making love to her," cries poor Duke. "It was a blackguard trick of him when he knew I loved her. But I suppose" (mournfully) "no one could be with her and not love her."

A sudden flash of memory reminds Angie of the laughing threat Cis had uttered—for a moment she feels almost guilty.

"Cis!" she repeats slowly.

"I never dreamed," cries Duke, "that he was going for that. I thought it was her sister he was after."

"But," says Angie, unable yet to grasp the situation, "how do you know?"

"Bel gave me a hint, and then, when I spoke to her, she turned round upon me and said she never wanted to see me again. You know how cantankerous

Bel always was before—well, to-day he was quite different; he told me to speak and left me alone with her on purpose."

"What!" says Angie, "when he believed she was in love with Cis?"

"I suppose it was unwise," groans Duke. "But he thought there might be a chance."

Angie wonders mutely to herself at the astounding want of tact of the wiser and nobler sex.

"So," she says, possessed by a spirit of divination, "you told her you loved her and she was reluctant to hear you, and then you taxed her with being in love with Cis!"

Duke stares at her as though she were a witch.

"Did you guess all that?" he asks, amazed, and then his voice breaks and he groans. "Oh! Angie, I shall never get over this! I wish I had a bullet through my brain!"

She has taken the arm-chair near the fire, and Duke flings himself on the rug at her feet and lays his head in her lap, his big frame convulsed by mighty sighs.

She puts a caressing hand on his head and looks down at him with humid eyes, feeling for him as a mother might for a beloved son. Once he suffered like this for her sake. Do you think she feels bitter because he has forsworn his allegiance? Do you think she is conscious of any sense of triumph in witnessing his punishment? If you do, you do not

know Angie. She is capable of going straight to Cilla and of pleading to her for Duke. If there had been that between them which the world believed and smilingly consented to connive at, it might have been different. The jealousy of a mistress is even more cruel than that of a wife—the infidelity of a lover more unpardonable than that of a husband. What the lover owes his mistress is by comparison as the difference between a debt of honour and a tailor's bill. But Angie had always felt that she had no claim on Duke—that the moment he was inspired by the wish to marry and found a woman to please him, she would be committing a positive wrong by standing in his light.

And now she feels genuinely sorry for him—as she is witness of his misery; if it lay with her, she would have matters be as he desires them.

"Poor boy!" she utters soothingly, and strokes his thick chestnut hair as if he were a boy instead of a man verging upon middle age. And then she bethinks her of comforting words. "She is such a child," she whispers, "she does not know her own mind. Cis is just the sort of man to dazzle a young girl, but when she finds that he means nothing, she will soon be *désillusionnée*. I daresay it will cost her a heartache, but afterwards she will be able to appreciate you."

"No, no," groans Duke, refusing to be comforted, "it is all over with me. She will never care for me.

Why should she? I'm a dull fellow. I've got nothing but my money and that won't buy her. Why of course, all these years that women have been angling for me, I knew it wasn't me they cared for, but I got into a sort of way of thinking that I had only to open my arms to a woman for her to throw herself straight into them. But," almost fiercely, "I love, I respect her all the more, God bless her! because she won't sell herself. She told me if I had fifty times as much, she wouldn't have me."

"She will be wiser some day," thought Angie with a bitter twinge.

Then Duke, yearning for sympathy with, for the moment, an almost womanly craving, cries,

"Oh, Angie! why didn't I meet you before you married Algy! If I had had you I should always have been faithful to you, and then this wouldn't have happened to me!"

"Faithful!" echoes Angie with a little bitter ring in her voice. "Was there ever a man faithful in this world yet? Never to a good woman at least, nor a woman who loved him, if she belonged to him, I am quite sure."

"Oh, Angie!" utters Duke in a penitent voice, fancying he reads reproach in her tone. "I know I must seem ungrateful to you, but—but——"

"My dear," she answers softly, "you owe me nothing. I was not thinking of you. We have been

the best of friends always. Indeed," caressingly, "what should I have done without you."

"And you," says Duke fervently, kissing her hands, "have been my good angel. But now," relapsing into despondency, "no one can do anything for me—not even you. All I want is to get away." Then rising and pacing the room restlessly, "I could not stop here—it would drive me mad to be within reach of her and to have to keep away. I shall put off the people who were coming next week. I mean to go up to town for a few days, and then I shall be off to America."

"America!" cries Angie startled.

At this moment the door opens and Captain Beauclerc comes in. Seeing his wife, he pauses as though he felt himself to be an unwelcome intruder.

"Come in," says Duke. "I have no secrets from you and Mrs. Beauclerc. You may as well hear all about it. It's all up with me. My little girl has refused me, and I'm off to America."

Algy cannot repress the delighted twinkle in his eyes. He looks over admiringly at his wife with an expression that says plainly,

"This is your doing. By Jove! what a clever woman you are!" and Angie reads the look and turns away from him bitter at heart because she has loved him and knows that he has never understood her, but has always credited her with selfish and ignoble motives.

Captain Beauclerc tries to throw a look of regret into his face as he turns to Duke.

"This is a bad job," he says. "But don't despair, old chap! When a girl says No, she always means it to be Yes next time."

But Duke is not to be comforted by any common-places that Algy can offer.

"Not this one," he says. "Not this one," he repeats with a groan.

"Why, I thought it was all cut and dried," remarks Captain Beauclerc. "What has made her turn round?"

"It is Deerbrook's doing," returns Duke so desperately wretched that he does not care who knows the truth. "He has been over there making love to her, curse him!"

Again Algy looks over at his wife, and again she reads his look and is hurt and wounded by it.

"Oh!" it says—"that is how you managed it. Capital! Excellent!"

"Cis!" he utters aloud, putting on a puzzled air. "But it's no use his thinking of her. What little she has would be no good to him."

"He doesn't mean to marry her," retorts Duke bitterly. "It is only his cursed vanity. And she, poor little girl! knows nothing about the world and can't see through him. I daresay he'll break her heart."

"Serve her right, the little fool, if she didn't

know when she was well off!" says Algy, but Duke winces.

Angie rises and moves towards the door.

"If you want me, send word to me," she says softly to Duke as he opens it for her.

Before the guests at the Court separate for the night, everyone knows that Duke has been rejected and everyone attributes it to Angie's cleverness. Duke takes no pains to conceal his wretchedness, and Algy has whispered the story about confidentially, affecting to be very sorry for "poor old Duke." The women all say, without affectation, that they are very glad—that it was a ridiculous hallucination on his part and that an insignificant chit like Miss St. George was quite unsuited to become the mistress of the Court. As for him, and they smiled, he would soon get over it. He was a good creature, but they seemed to think he had not very much heart to break. Almost unconsciously they treated Angie with more than their wonted consideration and civility, and Angie chafed and felt bitter and humiliated by their courtesies, being quite able to read between the lines. They looked upon her as a selfish schemer; after the manner of the Mammon of unrighteousness they lauded her for her cleverness, they admired her for having used Cis as a catspaw to pull her chestnuts out of the fire—she who was incapable of stooping to a mean action.

Everyone wondered that she should be so grave and quiet when she ought to be full of triumph, but that, of course, was part of her cleverness to seem as though she were sorry for Duke. What an actress she was, to be sure!

But in truth it went to her heart to see him look so wretched and she would fain have found some means to console him. And for the few days that they remained together at the Court, his only comfort was in talking to her about his broken heart and she listened on apparently with unflagging interest to the constant iteration of his woes. He could hardly bear her out of his sight. "*On revient toujours à ses premières amours,*" said one guest to another and smiled.

A few days later, Angie received a letter from Lady Chester.

"I am sorry," she said in it, "that poor Duke is so cut up, but I daresay he will get over it and I am thankful his foolish fancy is not likely to come to anything. I knew it would be all right when you came."

This was the severest stab Angie had yet had—the more so because it was intended as a compliment and a congratulation. So they all thought the same of her. By a clever little stroke of diplomacy she had made the man she liked and who had been good to her all these years, wretched. And no doubt they believed that she was glorying in her work.

She was stung to the quick, and, acting to the impulse of the moment, a thing experience had taught her of late years to refrain from doing, she ran to Duke's room.

"Duke!" she cried with a flushed face, "do *you* think I am false to you? Do *you* believe that it was my doing that Cis went to Red Meade?"

He started. The idea had never crossed his mind until this moment that she put it there herself.

He looked fixedly at her and she returned his gaze with an honest unblenching regard.

"No, my dear," he said firmly and loyally. "God bless you! If no one else knows you, I do."

Angie burst into tears. But she was comforted. There was at all events one creature in the world who believed in her.

There is no question that love, especially prosperous love, makes people selfish and inclined to think that everything must give way before this passion of theirs which appears to them the most important fact in creation. If Duke had now and again felt slight twinges of remorse on the subject of Angie, they had been of a very transient nature and had not caused him any great inconvenience; but now he could see that he had been very selfish and thoughtless in his behaviour to her and burned to atone for it. What an angel she had been in this business! how sympathetic! how magnanimous! how

she had kept all her own feelings in the background! Now he wanted to make her some return for her goodness and racked his brains to know how to do it. Then he thought of her boy. And after long and serious consideration he hit upon a plan which, without saying a word to Angie, he proceeded to carry into execution.

It was a few nights previous to his departure. Duke was in town and dined, as a matter of course, with the Beauclercs. Angie had left him and Algy, and they were thoughtfully smoking their cigars.

"Algy!" said Duke suddenly, "I've got something to tell you. But, just for the present, it's to be a secret."

"A secret, eh?" observed Algy in a friendly and interested tone.

"Yes. I don't want Mrs. Beauclerc to know it—that is, not just yet."

"All right," said Algy.

"I am going away," Duke went on in rather a melancholy tone, "and heaven knows whether I may ever come back."

"Don't talk like that, my dear old chap," cried Algy heartily. "Why! what's going to America?"

"One never can tell," returned Duke as though he rather cherished the idea of some dreadful fate befalling him. "Look at poor Jack! when he dined with us the night before he started for Canada and was so cheery and full of spirits, did he ever think

that six weeks after they'd be bringing his dead body home?"

"Tut! tut!" said Algy who hated disagreeable subjects: "don't be getting such dismal ideas into your head! You're all right enough—there's nothing likely to happen to you."

"It may or it may not," answered Duke. "However, that's not the question! You know, Algy; you and your wife are the best friends I have. I owe everything to you. I don't know what my life would have been without you both."

An agreeable sense of warmth stole to Captain Beauclerc's heart. He felt that as their services were being so gratefully alluded to, there must be some idea in Duke's mind of rewarding them.

"My dear Duke," he cried with the greatest cordiality, "don't say a word. What should we have done without you?"

"I daren't give a hint to Mrs. Beauclerc," proceeded Duke, "she's so proud—she never will accept anything from one, and it does seem so awfully hard when one has got such a lot more than one wants, not to be able to benefit the people you love most in the world. But I've got an idea. You know, Algy, how fond I am of that boy of yours. Well, I've always longed to do something for him, and now I want to make a certainty of it in case I die or marry, or—in fact, whatever happens to me. I'm going to settle something on him—never mind

what! you'll know after I'm gone—so that he can go to Eton and college and into the Army afterwards if he likes."

"My dear old boy!" cried Algy. "I don't know what to say."

"Say nothing," answered Duke quickly. "I'm the person benefited and obliged. It's the only thing that has cheered me up or done me the least bit of good since—since my trouble. It's all settled. I've made over a deed of gift to the boy and placed it in the hands of trustees."

Duke had a great liking for Captain Beauclerc, but he was not imbued with any very strong faith in him, and thought it would be wiser not to let him have anything to do with the handling of the money.

Algy felt a trifle disappointed, but he grasped Duke's hand and repeated his thanks with great fervour.

"Don't tell your wife until after I've gone," said Duke, and Algy promised though he did not for a moment believe in her ignorance. He thought it was her usual way of throwing dust in his eyes, and applauded her cleverness and her good taste.

"And," pursued Duke, "I've sent for the brown horse. You'll look after the stables here for me and keep the horses exercised. Jackson will come every morning for orders and Mrs. Beauclerc will be able to drive all day if she likes, and the chestnut will

do for night work. I don't want those fellows to get lazy whilst I'm away, and if you're not satisfied with them, give them the sack. And I've told Hobson to send game and fruit here every week instead of to Park Lane, and if you care to go down and shoot and take anyone down with you, you know you're welcome."

Certainly Duke was a very desirable friend to have and Algy acknowledged the fact gratefully.

It seemed to Duke as if he could not do enough for Angie. He went down to the school where her boy was and tipped him royally and one or two of his friends besides, and then he gave himself a pleasure which he had often longed for but never dared to put into execution before. He went to his jewellers and bought a pair of large diamond solitaires of the finest water and he wrote a note with them and gave them to Algy to deliver as soon as he was gone.

The time for parting arrived. Duke's hansom was at the door. Algy had discreetly left the pair in the drawing-room to make their adieux in private.

Angie stands by the chimney-piece, her eyes wet with tears. Duke is beside her. All his old tenderness for her seems to come back at this moment, but it is a different sort of feeling, passionless, brimming over with real affection. There is something less and something more in their hearts for each other than though they were brother and

sister, mother and son; but there is no feeling that the most rigid moralist could find harm in or be shocked at.

"Good-bye, dear darling Angie!" utters Duke in a smothered voice, and he lays a hand on either shoulder and stoops to kiss her cheek. And she, for the first time in her life, kisses him.

"Good-bye, my dear," she says, and a little sob chokes her.

"God bless you!" murmurs Duke, with an unwonted dimness in his eyes. "You won't forget me?"

"Never," she says fervently.

And then he is gone. Angie hears his voice and her husband's in the hall—hears the doors of the Hansom bang to and then she throws herself into a chair and a dreadful feeling of loneliness sweeps over her. Do we ever value a thing until we lose it? For ten years Duke had been her friend and constant companion, and never, never once had she felt towards him what she feels at this moment of parting from him. She had grown used to him; had accepted his devotion as a matter of course. Sometimes it had bored her a little. Her heart had never throbbed at his voice nor her hand thrilled at his touch. He had been the best, kindest, dearest creature in the world, but, after all,—only Duke.

Now she knew what it was to lose him.

Presently Algy came in. He was in a pleasant,

affable humour. He too had had his present—a princely one of wine and cigars.

"Poor old Duke! he seems rather low. I'm sorry he's gone. However it's better than if he had stopped and made a fool of himself about that girl. Here!" and he threw a parcel into his wife's lap, "I was to give you this after he was gone. He knew you wouldn't take it from him," he said.

And then Captain Beauclerc departed and Angie opened the parcel with listless fingers. There was a note and she read that first.

"You never would take an ornament from me," it said, "but now I am going away, and you may never see me again, you won't refuse to make me happy by accepting this from your most devoted friend." Angie's eyes were so dim that when she opened the case she could not see how brilliant the stones were.

After dinner Algy told her what Duke had done for the boy and then, like a woman, she fell into a passion of tears and sobs.

Captain Beauclerc did not attempt to fathom the cause of this outburst, but smoked one of Duke's cigars and waited patiently until Angie should come to herself again.

CHAPTER II.

Cilla, as she walked away from Duke with her head in the air and a high-beating heart, felt rather pleased with herself for what she had done. She had vindicated her dignity, and though we may smile at the presumption of a young Miss for thinking she has any dignity to vindicate, girls and boys not unfrequently cherish a larger sense of their importance than they do later when experience has taught them to find their level.

It was a dreadful offence Duke having presumed to hint that she cared for Cis. It was a far more aggravated one that he should have hinted that Mr. Deerbrook was only trifling with her. Indeed, she had not attempted to realise what she expected from Cis, but had been so far content to envelop him in a halo of glory and romance and to fall down and worship before him in her heart. It was intolerable that a coarse hand should tear this veil aside and try to make her see her idol in the naked, garish light of day. She thought Duke a very rude, gross person, and wondered how she had ever come to like him at all. However, she had now looked her last upon him. For the future when he came to Red Meade, she would shut herself in

her room and refuse to see him. Not knowing that Belhaven had gone over to the enemy, she fancied herself sure of his countenance and sanction.

Cilla walked quickly home and went to her room where she intended to stay, sending an excuse for not appearing at luncheon. But just as it was time for the gong to sound, she heard the crunching of hoofs on the gravel, and looking out, espied Duke going by in his buggy.

Then Miss Cilla was divided between regret and relief—she had a momentary feeling that she had behaved unkindly to him and had caused him pain. She was no longer so proud of herself nor so sensitive about her dignity—she even thought she had been a little bit hasty, not to say foolish.

However, he was gone, and there was nothing now to prevent her going down to luncheon, and, as she was very hungry, it was a relief in every way. But she had no sooner taken her seat at the table than she was aware that she was in disgrace. Belhaven's manner to her was extremely cold and he scarcely addressed her, whilst her sister regarded her with ill-concealed contempt and displeasure.

Why should Bel have changed towards her when up to this time he had been opposed to Duke's suit? And, for the last few days, he had been so extremely kind and gentle in his manner to her that she felt his alienation all the more.

The lord and lady of Red Meade chatted to-

gether in the most amicable way in the world—to see them, no one would have dreamed of the dreadful scene that had taken place between them eight and thirty hours before. On Belhaven's part this was the renewal of love: Dorothea had no love to renew, but she had been frightened and felt a certain amount of awe of her husband and so was on her very best behaviour. She had not forgotten nor forgiven: good-*tempered* people seldom do—they bide their time and can enjoy their revenge a year hence as well as at the moment of offence. Good-*hearted* people have, not unfrequently, bad tempers, but, as a rule, they are utterly incapable of harbouring malice, and when their burst of temper is over are only too anxious to forget their wrongs.

When Bel had wished Duke good-bye, feeling more friendship for him than he had ever done before, he ran to his Dorothea to tell her what had befallen. And Dorothea was furious.

The idea of a chit like Cilla daring to assume such airs of importance and to treat a man with eighty thousand a-year in that sort of way! She was particularly attached to the "I told you so" form of reproach, and she turned upon her husband with considerable irritation and said,

"It was absurd taking her away from her lessons. She ought to have been left with her governess until Christmas as I told you and as poor, dear mamma wished and intended. Her head is quite turned

now: she is as conceited as a peacock, and no doubt thinks she can have any man she holds up her hand to."

Dorothea seldom allowed herself to be so much put out, but, to a very worldly woman, to lose a brother-in-law with an enormous income is a very severe trial.

"I really think," she proceeded, "that the best thing to do would be to pack her off to school."

Here the gong sounded and they went in to lunch.

Nothing was so dreadful to Cilla as to be looked coldly upon and treated like a culprit. All her pride and self-gratulation melted away and she felt thoroughly miserable. Belhaven went out the instant luncheon was over and the sisters were left alone together. Dorothea scarcely waited for the door to close upon him when she flew at Cilla. This in itself was a most unusual action for the placid, smiling, selfish, unruffled Dorothea.

"And so," she said, with a glance of contempt, "I hear that you have been sending Duke about his business! I have no doubt you think you've done a very fine thing and are extremely proud of yourself!"

Cilla's eyes grew dim at once as they invariably did when she was addressed with harshness.

"It is preposterous," continued Dorothea, "that at your age you should have had an offer at all. I

expect it was only some strange perverseness in Duke to take a fancy to some one that no one else would be likely to want, and I daresay, in a month's time, he will think himself well out of it."

"I hope so," returned Cilla, recovering a little of her pride and her temper together.

"Ah!" said Dorothea, with scorn, "you never had any sense. The only person who knew how to manage you was Miss Steinman. If it had not been for Bel's silly Quixotic nonsense, you would have been at your lessons with her now."

Dorothea could not possibly have said anything more calculated to wound her sister's feelings. At these words, all the dreadful memories of her past miseries came sweeping over Cilla and her tears fell like rain.

Dorothea wished to hurt her, and seeing that she had been successful so far, continued,

"However, as I have no intention of being worried with your silliness, and as I certainly shall not have a governess in the house, I think the best way will be for you to go to a finishing school for a year and a half."

Then, indeed, poor Cilla came down from her pedestal and felt herself abased, crushed, humbled under her sister's feet. She, who erewhile had been the beloved of so important a personage as Duke Vereker; who much more, had dared to dream herself the ladye-love of a hero like Cis, to be torn

from her exalted position and threatened with terrors worse than death. For schools, governesses, lessons were to her mind but other names for prisons, gaolers, fetters, scourges, general grief, woe and desolation.

The threat almost took her breath away, and Dorothea, delighted with the effect she had produced, took pains to heighten it.

"There are lots of good schools at Brighton," she went on cruelly. "I shall write and make inquiries."

Cilla wept on in helpless misery. After all she was in her sister's power—if she chose to carry out this terrible threat, she could do it if Belhaven did not stand her friend. And he had looked coldly at her—he too was angry with her.

It was so rare with Dorothea to put herself out that, when she did, she liked to make the most of it. Cilla's head wanted to have the conceit taken out of it, she thought, and she did her very best to perform the operation thoroughly.

"You are utterly unfit to go into society at present," she went on. "You have not even the faintest idea how to behave. You were quite rude to Mrs. Beauclerc the day we lunched at the Court, though I had warned you to be civil to her. And I was ashamed to see the way you made eyes at Mr. Deerbrook."

Behind the handkerchief with which Cilla is try-

ing to stanch the floods of her tears, the crimson mounts to the very roots of her hair at this awful and gross accusation.

"Before you can be taken out with safety, you will have to learn to control your face a little, unless you wish to be the laughing-stock of everybody," Dorothea resumed, letting her own little private pique go to swell her general displeasure. "When Cis was here, every creature, every servant in the place must have known you were in love with him and throwing yourself at his head. At lunch that day when he and I were laughing and talking, you looked the picture of jealous misery. If you are going to take it into your head that every man who says a civil word to you is in love with you, you'll make yourself wretched and ridiculous too. And, if you have behaved in this way to Duke because you think Cis cares two straws about you, pray divest your mind of that idea. Cis is like that to *every* woman he meets, but when he is in love, as I have seen him once or twice, I promise you it is a very different thing."

Dorothea has succeeded at last in goading Cilla to madness. The poor girl rushes from the room and flying upstairs, locking herself fast in, she gives vent to a madness of grief and agony. For the time she is even insensible to the appeals of the pug, who scratches and whines piteously for admittance. Oh! for the wings of a dove! for a wilderness! for

a convent! for a lake wherein to drown herself! for anything—except a school. How wild and passionate is the misery and despair of youth! how badly it takes its punishments! how foolishly elated it is over its joys! If Cilla could but have buoyed her heart up with the thought that Cis cared for her, she could have borne martyrdom even, but those cruel words of Dorothea's rankled like poisoned arrows in her breast. "When he *is* in love, I promise you it is a very different thing."

After the first dreadful outburst was over, Cilla rose from her knees, let in the pug, bathed her eyes and then retired to her sofa with her faithful friend cuddled up comfortably in her arms. She began to take rather a less depressing view of matters. Whatever Dorothea might do, she did not believe that Belhaven who had so staunchly championed her before, would allow the terrible indignity which her sister threatened to be inflicted upon her. She, a young lady at large, with a maid of her own and an independent fortune, (for she and Dorothea were to share equally the twelve hundred a year left by Mrs. St. George); she, moreover, who had been singled out from all the maidens of England by Mr. Vereker, she to be sent into bondage and slavery! For Cilla had never been at school, and thought of such a place with more horror even than of the Hades where wicked souls are tormented. There was only one type of governess to her otherwise

imaginative mind and this was moulded on the abhorred Fräulein.

When Lady Belhaven took an idea into her head she was exceedingly tenacious of it. Like many a pretty, soft-mannered woman whom, to look at, you would imagine to be "tender over drowning flies," her heart was of adamant. She did not care for Cilla—in fact, Cilla bored her. She had an idea that the girl's presence rather militated against her influence over Bel. At one time she had thought her sister would be a companion and useful to take about with her, but, instead, she found her a great *gêne* on conversation, and the reproachful and disapproving glances she had read in Cilla's eyes during Mr. Deerbrook's visit had provoked her extremely. Decidedly she was a young savage who ought to be at her lessons. No doubt even one term at school would bring her to reason and she would be only too thankful and grateful to Duke if he resumed his attentions to her. If she, Dorothea, could only keep up Mr. Vereker's feeling for her sister, everything might yet turn out well. Yes, school was the place for Cilla and thither she should go.

Dorothea's only fear was about Bel—if Cilla cried and besought and went on her knees to him, as she would be sure to do, he was so weak that he might be induced to side with her; but the lovely Dorothea bethought herself that she had weapons even more potent than tears and entreaties. So she

sought her lord and placed herself on his knee with one arm round his neck and the other hand caressing his hair and face, and behaved herself as Delilah did when she wanted to coax Samson. And as, whenever Delilah chooses to play that charming part, Samson, if he loves her, is bound to fall, Belhaven forgot the pleading, fawn-like eyes of his poor little sister-in-law, and consented to everything that Dorothea proposed. There was no doubt it was utterly absurd for a young girl, not seventeen, to be going about like a grown-up woman—every other girl of her age was at her lessons, and the best place for her too. Dorothea was right and he had been wrong in taking her away from her governess —at this moment, Belhaven was disposed to think, no matter what his wife said or did, that she was in the right.

Two days went by, and though Cilla was very unhappy because of the coolness shown her by Lord and Lady Belhaven, her worst fears had subsided: she thought the talk of sending her to school had been simply a threat used to frighten her, and that, having accomplished its purpose, it was put away and forgotten. What, then, was her horror to see on her sister's escritoire two letters addressed in Dorothea's hand, one to Miss White at Brighton, the other to Mrs. Black in the same marine town. Her heart literally stood still; a deadly sickness came over her; an anguish of horror.

Then it was no vain threat! As soon as she recovered herself, she flew to Belhaven's room where he was sitting alone. When she found that, in spite of his kind manner, he meant to be firm and to support Dorothea, she fell into one of those violent outbreaks of despair which had formerly so incensed her mother. Her slight frame seemed as if it could scarce contain her passion. Belhaven was positively frightened—he could believe now in the scenes which his wife had described to him as having taken place when Cilla was in what Dorothea called "one of her tempers." It was shocking to see a young girl with so little self-control, he thought: if her passions were so fierce when roused, they might be equally dangerous in love as in anger or sorrow. This was the disagreeable side of the charming, impressionable, sensitive nature with which he had been so taken.

She wanted discipline, no doubt, and this idea of Dorothea's was a very wise and sensible one. But, meantime, he was so frightened by the child's violent agitation; by the wildness of her words, and the tornado of passion that seemed to convulse her frail body that he had recourse to soothing words, at which Cilla caught, and turned into a hope that, after all, he meant to stand between her and misery.

Several days passed and then the thunderbolt fell. Dorothea, not wanting to have a scene, or

thinking that it would be wiser if one did happen to have a third person present, made the following curt announcement to her sister after dinner in Belhaven's presence,

"It is all settled about your going to school, Cilla—we have found a most desirable one at Brighton. You will be made very happy and comfortable. So now, all you have to do is to make up your mind to submit to what cannot be helped with a good grace."

Cilla darted one swift glance at Belhaven. It was a dreadful "Et tu, Brute" sort of look, and gave him a horrid, remorseful, traitor-like sensation. He thought Dorothea had spoken in rather a harsh, unfeeling manner, and he tried to pour oil on the troubled waters.

"My dear little girl!" he cried hastily, in his kindest voice, "don't take it too much to heart! Every other young girl of your age is still at her studies. I feel that it is entirely I who am to blame for having yielded to your entreaties in London and separated you from your governess. But this will be a very different state of things—you will be made tremendously happy and comfortable; you are to have a horse to ride: every consideration will be paid you—the lady seems a charming person; it will be quite like home to you."

Cilla does not answer by so much as a word—she makes no scene this time. Her lip quivers;

once more she darts that look, the look of a wounded fawn, at Belhaven, and then, very quietly, she pushes back her chair from the table and leaves the room.

Upstairs she goes slowly and mechanically, and entering her own room and shutting the door behind her, throws open the window and looks out into the frosty, moonlit, windless night. She wants air—there is a desperate choking feeling in her throat. This time she does not give vent to any burst of despair—her senses seem paralysed; a benumbed feeling creeps about her heart. After a few minutes she shivers, as well she may in her thin dress, at the biting cold, and, shutting the window, she goes and sits down on the hearth-rug staring at the fire.

The pug crawls into her lap and establishes himself comfortably with his black muzzle thrust into one of her slender hands, but she is far, far away in the clouds, in dreamland, in some unpractical region wherein nor common-sense nor worldly wisdom have ever set foot. Once upon a time when maidens were persecuted, they fled away from their homes out into the world. Delightful, dazzling thought to a young girl's mind who has no smallest knowledge of what going out into the great wide world alone means! Some of these forlorn ones fled to the knight whom they loved and he did chivalrous battle for their wrongs, or else they died for love's sake of him like Elaine. And to the mind of a

romantic young girl there is no thought so blissful as that of dying for love.

"Love, thou art bitter; sweet is death to me—
Oh love, if death be sweeter, let me die."

A wild idea which made her heart throb fiercely, came to Cilla. She would fly to Cis. In her romances she had read of girls who flung themselves at the feet of knights and heroes and prayed to be their servants and slaves. If Cilla had dared to say to herself that he loved her, perhaps she might seriously have entertained the thought of some such mad, wild act. Then another idea took possession of her. At least there was one man who loved her; to whom she might appeal, and a feeling of remorse stole into her heart to think how ungratefully and harshly she had treated Duke. He would be her champion if she asked him—he would save her from these cruel unnatural relatives, who cared nothing about breaking her heart and reducing her to despair. Yes, she would appeal to Duke—her resolve was taken—she began to con over in her mind what she would say to him. A low tap came at the door; the pug jumped up and barked.

Cilla went and opened it. Belhaven stood outside looking very unhappy. He had tried to persuade Dorothea to go and see after her sister, but Dorothea had said,

"Oh! leave her alone. She will cry and stamp and roar, and then she'll get over it!"

But Belhaven was tender-hearted.

He was surprised to see Cilla apparently so cool and collected.

"Won't you come down, my dear?" he said kindly.

Cilla drew herself up and answered him with freezing politeness.

"No, thank you."

"Shall I bring you up some coffee?"

"No, thank you."

"My dear little girl," cried Belhaven, "don't take it to heart so. Indeed it is for your good."

"Thank you," said Cilla. "I quite appreciate your kindness."

He stood aghast at her tone and manner and then she calmly shut the door upon him and locked it.

Going to her writing-table she began a note to Duke.

"DEAR MR. VEREKER,

"I am very sorry for having behaved so ungratefully to you. Please forgive me. I want very *very* much to see you. Will you please come to me as soon as you can.

"Yours sincerely,

"LUCILLA ST. GEORGE."

And the next day she posted the letter in the village with her own hands.

CHAPTER III.

Not Sister Anne, watching from Blue-beard's tower, looked more eagerly for the approaching deliverers than did Cilla for the coming of her champion. Every morning about the time that Duke had been wont to make his visits to Red Meade, she walked down the drive and along the high road to meet him, and every day she turned homewards, her heart gnawed by disappointment with Mariana's dismal refrain on her lips,

"'He cometh not,' she said."

Of course he was disgusted with her: she could see now how natural it was that he should be so. What else could a man of his importance and consideration do but resent such treatment! After the fourth day, a dull despair took possession of her—her face grew deathly pale; her eyes looked abnormally large. There was a dreadful woe-begone look about her that irritated Dorothea and went to Belhaven's heart: she scarcely ate; neither read, played nor worked, and only replied by monosyllables to anyone who addressed her. She felt herself forsaken, deserted by all.

We may be quite sure that had Duke received

her letter, he would have flown to her on the wings of love, or, if that were impossible, have replied with speed and ardour to her communication, but it so happened that it never reached him for months after it was penned and for a perfectly simple reason. Before leaving home, Mr. Vereker said to his butler,

"Don't forward any bills or circulars nor anything but private letters." In consequence of this order, Mr. Hooper, guided by his own discretion, sent on every communication he imagined to come under one category and kept back the others, amongst them Cilla's. Now Cilla had no correspondents of any sort or kind, therefore, when she wanted to write to Duke and looked about her for materials, she found nothing but some cheap common paper and envelopes in an old desk. So no wonder that Mr. Hooper, seeing a thin, long-shaped envelope of the commonest description addressed in rather an unformed hand, threw it aside with the bills and circulars, and that he carefully forwarded its companion by the same post which was thick and square and bore a splendid monogram, and was, as a matter of fact, a wine-merchant's circular.

Belhaven began to be very much worried in his mind about his sister-in-law. He knew that young girls had dreadful morbid ideas sometimes, and a horror seized him from the strangeness of Cilla's manner that she was contemplating some rash act. He could not bear to see her look of misery—it

haunted and tormented him. Now Belhaven was not very good-tempered and he was rather inclined to be dogmatic, but he was as tender-hearted as a woman; not a woman like his wife, who had no heart at all, but as the typical and ideal woman. He said constantly to Dorothea that, after all, he was not quite comfortable about Cilla; that he doubted the wisdom of the school-plan, but she pooh-poohed him with scorn.

Cilla was insufferable, she declared; she only counted the days till she should be gone and then she and Bel, with a sweet little smile, would be happy together. But heavenly though this prospect appeared to an adoring husband, he could not reconcile himself to purchasing bliss at the expense of Cilla's misery, and he communed much within himself about his duty to her and what would be most expedient for her. His experience on the subject was not very large, but he felt that she was not like other girls and that she had a terrible capacity for suffering. One afternoon at dusk he went softly into the morning-room fancying he heard some unusual sound, and there was Cilla on the rug by the fire sobbing as if her very heart would break. She was not aware of his presence and he crept away stealthily to his own room and there remained for an hour buried in thought. Later he confided to her ladyship the result of his deliberations. He and Dorothea were sitting in the boudoir:

(Cilla always went to her room with her faithful companion after dinner now:) Bel was in his favourite position at his wife's feet holding one of her small many-ringed hands.

"My darling," he says looking up in her face with a fixed, devouring glance as though he could never satiate himself with its fairness, "do you know I can't make up my mind that we are acting rightly by Cilla."

"Oh!" utters my lady with a shade of petulance, "please don't begin about that again. It's all done and settled now and there's an end of it."

"But," pleads my lord, "she takes it so terribly to heart. Suppose," lowering his voice and speaking in rather an awed tone, "she should take it into her head to do something rash—to run away—or——" He pauses, not even daring to put his thought into words.

"Stuff!" retorts Dorothea who is phlegmatic and practical rather than imaginative. "Where is she to run to? To Cis?" She merely makes this suggestion to ridicule Belhaven, as the most preposterous absurd notion she could conceive, but, strangely enough, she strikes the very thought that had crossed his mind and which he had tried to repudiate.

"Young girls do very strange things sometimes," he remarks uneasily; "do you remember the case of that girl in the papers a few months ago?"

"What a goose you are, Bel!" says Dorothea lightly. "For heaven's sake, don't let Cilla get it into her head that you are afraid of her."

"Should you like to go to London for a couple of months?" asks Belhaven, abruptly.

Dorothea's eyes glisten; her lips part.

"Should I like it?" she almost gasps. "Oh, Bel!"

He is not at all charmed by the joyous expression of her face; he can see how little good it augurs for him; even at this moment he realises that his sense of duty is making him stick a very big spoke in his own wheel, or, as the French proverb says so much more correctly, "put a stick between the spokes."

"Yes," he answers rather gloomily, "that is the only thing I can think of. I don't want to send the girl to school as she feels so bad about it; she can't go on mooning and moping here doing nothing but cry; if we go to town she can have masters and I daresay the thorough change will put fresh ideas into her head and take some of the nonsense out of it."

Dorothea, under other circumstances, would have furiously combated the idea of giving up her pet project for getting rid of her sister, but this was altogether a new and delightful plan which would suit her immensely. She was so deadly sick of the country and the monotony of her life. And to

be in London amongst her friends, within range of shops although she was still in deep mourning; to go where her Viscountess-ship would be of some pleasure and satisfaction to her was indeed a blissful prospect.

"How good you are, Bel!" she utters sweetly, and stoops her pretty mouth to kiss him. And even if Samson has a dim suspicion in his mind of the true value and meaning of these kisses, they are so intoxicating to him that he cares not so long as he gets them.

But now if Dorothea had been a loving wife, prodigal of caresses, would he not perchance have taken them coolly and perhaps been a shade bored by them?

"By the way," says Belhaven, when he has joyfully and thankfully received as much of his beloved's favour as she is inclined to bestow, "Green came in just before dinner and he tells me that Duke has gone off to America."

"Really!" exclaims Dorothea, opening her eyes wide. "Do you suppose it can possibly be on Cilla's account?"

"It looks uncommonly like it," returns Belhaven.

Then Dorothea gives vent to a movement of suppressed fury.

"To think of a miserable chit of a girl *daring* to refuse a man like Duke! I should like to whip her. I should like," vindictively, "to have her

dragged in chains to the altar." And nothing can be more earnest or truthful than this exposition of her ladyship's sentiments.

"Whether she loved him or not?" asks Belhaven, with a shade of sarcasm.

"Love!" says Dorothea, with an expression of supremest disgust, as though it conveyed to her nothing but ideas of intolerable folly and nauseousness.

"And yet," says Belhaven, torn in two with sweet and bitter emotions as he catches that lovely and unfeeling doll to his heart with an unwise want of self-restraint, "I think if you knew what love is, you would not speak so contemptuously of it."

"There, darling, that will do," returns Dorothea, with unfeigned ennui. "I daresay it's very nice—for those who like it."

And Belhaven, having brought down vengeance upon himself by his rashness, is foolish enough to feel hurt by her tone and manner.

So, after all, the dreadful sword of Damocles did not fall upon Cilla, and she no longer had occasion to rack her brain how to escape from it.

Kind-hearted people do not always perform their generous actions with the best grace in the world, and when Belhaven informed his sister-in-law of what he had done for her, there was unusual severity in his voice, unusual coldness in his eyes. When he had stated his plans, he added,

"I have gone to very great expense and trouble on your account, although I must say your behaviour of late has hardly been calculated to encourage one to do very much for you. You seem to act as though everyone here were your deadly enemy, and you have probably forgotten that your sister, in taking you to live with her, was only doing a kind action and not a compulsory one."

Cilla, as she listened with downcast eyes, felt a dreadful sense of remorse: she had indeed behaved badly and ungratefully, and was only too ready to cry "*mea culpa!*"

Seeing her penitence, Belhaven relented and proceeded in a kinder tone to tell her of the plans which he had made for the completion of her education. He knew full well that occupation is the one panacea for the ills of life; the sole tonic for a morbid state of mind, and he was thoroughly alive to the injurious effects the last month of complete idleness had worked upon Cilla.

It was not such a trial to him to leave the country in the winter and to go to London as some people might think. He was not tormented by the burning desire of most English gentlemen at large to be perpetually killing something—he did not hunt, and only took a moderate pleasure in shooting. He was interested in various scientific institutions; he liked to attend lectures—he occasionally contributed political and scientific articles to the more

serious magazines, although he strictly preserved his incognito; he also devoted no inconsiderable amount of time and money to benevolent and philanthropic institutions, and was a staunch supporter of the admirable Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. He was wise enough to know that the sincerest pleasure in life is in alleviating suffering and doing good to others, and liberal enough not to begrudge himself this satisfaction.

"Bel has all sorts of absurd, ridiculous ideas," Dorothea once told a friend. "When we first married, he wanted to bore me with them, but he is really very quick in some things, and when he saw that it did not amuse me he gave it up. He is always wanting to prosecute people for something or other—if he sees anyone beating a horse he flies into a rage—so ridiculous! as if animals felt like we do! And it is so provoking; he won't let the horses wear bearing-reins which quite spoils the look of them when they are standing. Now I like to see horses with their heads right up in the air so that they hardly look to have any neck at all."

"Certainly," answered her friend. "So do I. And, what's more, I have mine as I like."

Lord Belhaven had given one very stern and decided order to his wife. Under no pretext whatever was Cis Deerbrook to enter the doors of their house. And Dorothea, who was radiant at the thought of going to London and liked a dozen

other men quite as well as Cis, replied that she would make a point of attending to his wishes in the matter.

"Don't you think," she added, "that I am much more anxious than you can be for Cilla to marry Duke?"

But he, turning away petulantly, said he hoped to heaven there would be no more talk of marrying or giving in marriage for the next two years at least.

"How," he added, "can a child who has so little control over her emotions be fit to take the head of a man's house?"

"I pity the man who gets her," rejoined Dorothea. "Such a spit-fire!"

Lady Belhaven, however, since the London project had been mooted, had quite changed her manner to her sister, and instead of treating her with the contemptuous indifference that had characterised her manner of late was rather kind and conciliatory.

Cilla, her fears being removed, was very humble and well-behaved, and took especial pains to show her gratitude to Belhaven, and as he and she were very much of the same hasty though forgiving temper, they soon became fast friends again.

Dorothea had made up her mind that she would be very little troubled with Cilla when they got to town. Her bosom friend, Mrs. Verschoyle, would be

there, and it would be odd if, together, they could not amuse themselves.

It was towards the end of January when the party from Red Meade took up their abode in Grosvenor Street where Lord Belhaven had hired a furnished house for six months. Before a week was over, each had settled down in his own groove, for they had all come to London with fixed ideas of what they meant to do. Belhaven intended to devote himself a good deal to his young sister-in-law, about whom he felt rather a serious responsibility. He meant too to occupy his own mind and time as much as possible and he had given himself excellent advice on the subject of his behaviour to his wife. She was a pretty, vain, worldly woman—it was no use disguising the fact from himself: indeed, had he not known it all along? She cared for nothing but amusement, and if he attempted to deprive her of it, she would only look upon him as a tyrant, and hate and try to circumvent him. He must strive to conquer his jealousy; to shut his eyes as much as possible; to be content with what the beautiful doll could give him and not to be disappointed because she was stuffed with bran instead of flesh and blood. Dorothea, on her part, intended to be amiable and affectionate to her husband; not to flirt in his presence nor invite young men to his house, for she knew that at Flora Verschoyle's she would be sure to see everyone she cared to see

and would be able to amuse herself excellently without Bel being any the wiser.

And Cilla was animated by all sorts of excellent resolves. Whatever her brother-in-law arranged for her, she meant to fall in with now that she was not to be banished nor parted from her faithful pug.

So the masters who came to give her lessons, thought her the most intelligent and delightful of pupils, and she, finding herself treated with so much deference and consideration took the greatest pains to please and do them credit. Belhaven had brought up a couple of riding-horses and every day at twelve they rode out together. In the afternoon she either went walking with him or with her maid or practised her singing or painted on china which she had taken to with great ardour. Sometimes Belhaven took her to hear lectures or to see pictures or to the British Museum, and, being very simple minded and not knowing that it was the correct thing for a fashionable young girl to turn up her nose at science and useful knowledge, she was extremely interested and pleased with all she saw and heard and Belhaven found her a delightful companion. But, many a time, whilst Cilla was all eyes and ears for what was going on around her, Belhaven was biting his lips and wondering uncomfortably what Dorothea was doing—he hated and mistrusted her friendship with Mrs. Verschoyle whom he thought the worst companion in the world.

In spite of all her occupations, Cilla had plenty of time to think about Cis and she hugged her love to her romantic heart and nourished it on the thought that now she was in London, she was bound to see him. She was very uneasy about her letter to Duke of whose departure she had heard. The letter would be forwarded to him. Would it bring him back, or, if not, would he write to ask the meaning of it? She was terribly afraid of Belhaven or Dorothea knowing what she had done.

Cilla never forgot an old friend. As soon as it was settled that they were to go to London, she had besought her sister to let her have Mrs. Pearce, the crooked old seamstress, to work for her.

"You can have her if you like to pay for her," returned Dorothea.

"Certainly I will," said Cilla.

She had several times written and sent presents of money to her old friend. And it was with genuine pleasure that she greeted her after their long parting, and saw her established comfortably in the small dressing-room adjoining her bed-room. For her part, the old work-woman's eyes twinkled with pleasure at the sight of her favourite. She was presented to the pug and nodded at him and called him "poor feller," and he snuffed rather contemptuously at her, but subsequently went and sat on the corner of her rusty old black skirt, which was a mark of favour and condescension.

How much there was to tell! Cilla knelt by the old lady and shouted in her best ear, and, now and then, when her communications were of a more private nature, pencil and paper came into requisition and it seemed quite like old times, except that the written matter was not a Jeremiad as formerly.

"Lor, my dear!" says good old Mrs. Pearce, on the third day of her installation, "what a change it must be for you! We shall have you marrying some fine gentleman one of these days," and her keen old eyes twinkled sagaciously.

"Have you heard anything?" Cilla asks, not at all reluctant to confide in her sympathetic friend.

"Well," returns the old lady, with a wise nod, "a little bird just whispered to me that if you wasn't a very great lady one of these days, it 'ud be your own fault."

"What's the use if you don't care for anyone?" writes Cilla, not wishing her remark to be heard throughout the length and breadth of the house.

"What's the use if you don't carve for anyone!" mumbles her confidante, painfully deciphering Cilla's impulsive jottings.

"No," shouts Cilla. "Care!—care!"

"Ah! care—that's it," repeats Mrs. Pearce. "But, my dear," shaking her head, "young folks don't know what's good for 'em. Then when it's too late they're sorry. But they tell me he's such a fine gentleman; over six feet high."

Cilla, who is not devoid of vanity, fetches Duke's photograph in order to exhibit her conquest.

"Well, now," says Mrs. Pearce with enthusiasm, having carefully scrutinized the portrait, "that's what I call a fine man, that is. Now if I was a lady he's just what I should fancy."

Seized by a sudden inspiration, Cilla darts downstairs to the drawing-room and brings back her sister's album. It contains a photograph of Cis and she has pored so long and frequently over it that now the book always opens at that place.

"There!" she says, putting it in front of her old friend and blushing a little the while.

Mrs. Pearce scans it with the greatest attention, and then returns to the contemplation of Duke.

"No," she says, with great decision, "give me the other! He's got a better eye."

Cilla forms a mean opinion of the old woman's sagacity.

"Oh! no," she utters, shaking her head.

"Ah! my dear," rejoins Mrs. Pearce, with a little sigh, "it isn't always looks. It don't do to trust to a straight nose and a laughing eye. My lot 'ud have been very different if I hadn't been caught that way."

Cilla looks at the bent figure and shrivelled little old face—how strange it is to think that she should ever have had anything to do with love.

"Tell me about it," she says with a look of great interest.

For any story that has love for its theme is fascinating to a young girl whose own heart has been touched.

CHAPTER IV.

Mrs. Pearce lays her work down in her lap.

"Well, my dear," she says, fixing her spectacles, "I don't know that it's much of a story."

"Oh, yes, it is," protests Cilla. "And I want to hear it."

The old lady is flattered and waits for no further adjurations.

"When I was a gell," she says, "I kep' company with a young feller name o' Weston."

"Were you pretty?" shouts Cilla, to whom this seems rather an important fact to know if she is to be thoroughly interested in the recital. "I daresay you were," she adds, anxious not to imply any doubt in the matter.

"Well, my dear," rejoins Mrs. Pearce in an impartial tone, "some said I was. I don't think I was anything pertickler, except that I had a fresh skin and a bright eye. However, Jim Weston, for one, he thought I was."

"Who was he?" inquires Cilla at the top of her voice.

"Well, he was apprinticed to the grocer, and, years after, his master took him into partnership, and then, when old Jones died, he got the business all to hisself and married the chemist's daughter. And lor, my dear, he kept her like a lady, and she had her own shay and never went near the shop."

"And if you had married him, it would have been the same with you."

"That it would," answers Mrs. Pearce with emphasis, "for she never brought him a halfpenny."

"But why did you not marry him?" inquires Cilla.

"Because I was foolish like most young gells and didn't know what was good for me. Well, the other chap, him as I married afterwards, came along. He was a soger, he was, an' he had a way with him like they have of palavering one. He was reckoned very handsome, he was, and all the lasses were pulling caps about him, so when he come after me, why I didn't seem to make any account of Jim. He took on terrible, did Jim, and so did mother when she saw what was up. So then, being headstrong, I goes off with him and marries him on the sly."

"And were you happy?" inquires Cilla in tones of deepest interest.

"Happy!" echoes Mrs. Pearce with a little snort. "Why, he deserted me within three months and

never come back till I was earning my own money and there was something to rob me of. Why, over and over again he's sold the bed from under me. He never came nigh except there was something to get, and when he'd got it he was off again."

"What a shame!" cries Cilla indignantly. "But why did you let him?"

"I couldn't help myself—there wasn't no law then to prevent him, and though they say there's laws now to protect what a woman earns herself, they can't hinder a drunken good-for-nought from livin' on her earnings. He goes to the parish and says he can afford to keep her, and then he gets her home and makes her keep him and no one daren't detain her away from him."

"Why don't they make proper laws!" cries Cilla, thinking that she will talk very seriously to Belhaven on the subject and that he will have something done at once.

"Ah, my dear," returns Mrs. Pearce with unwonted bitterness—"they only makes laws to bind the poor; not to help 'em. But there, that's away from what we was talking of—you're a lady, and please God you'll never have no one to knock you about nor take your money away, but still, gentle folks do manage to quarrel and be unhappy, and if I was you," suddenly taking up Duke's picture and regarding it, "that 'ud be the gentleman I'd set my mind on."

Cilla shakes her head.

"You wouldn't think so if you saw them both," she answers, having recourse to her pencil again.

Lady Belhaven meanwhile is drinking tea with her bosom friend Flora Verschoyle.

Outside there is a nipping, biting east wind: every now and then a whirlwind of dust comes rushing up the street: her ladyship's servants are getting frozen; the footman, who already has a cold, curses masters, mistresses, servitude, weather; everything that presents an opening for a curse.

Dorothea, snugly ensconced in a delicious low chair in her friend's charming drawing-room, is perfectly happy and comfortable, and does not give one thought to anyone outside. She is only five minutes walk from her own house; she might take a cab or walk home and let her horses go to the stables and her servants to the shelter of four walls, but such an idea would never have entered her brain. Had anyone suggested it, she would have opened her blue eyes and asked what horses and servants were made for.

Being once in this pretty room it is no wonder at anyone being reluctant to leave it—the bright fire dances up the chimney—a little tripod with hot cakes stands in the fender—a beautiful service of *repoussé* silver is on a table near the fire, and, on another, sherry, bitters and liqueurs are laid out for

the male visitors who are quite sure to drop in presently. There are low couches covered with rich eastern stuffs; there is a whole curiosity shop of Chelsea and Dresden china; there are tables spread with photographs and silver ornaments and enamel snuff-boxes and smelling bottles and quaint glass vases holding hot-house flowers. The rich draperies are drawn across the windows—two delicately-shaded lamps throw a soft light over everything—no wonder that anyone should forget what it is like outside.

Mrs. Verschoyle is a pretty woman though far behind Dorothea in beauty—then Lady Belhaven is exceptionally lovely, but Flora is piquante, dresses well, and her friends and admirers are numerous. Her husband does not care two straws for her nor she for him, but they leave each other alone; go their own ways and do not quarrel. He gives her plenty of money and perfect freedom and she never asks any questions about his doings or concerns.

Flora and Dorothea are really fond of each other as two women often are who have the same tastes and pursuits until they happen to clash. There is no chance of this at present, and, indeed, women of the world know the advantage of mutual services and good will too well to play tricks with each other except under extraordinary provocation. Flora has given Dorothea her tea and muffin and sits down in front of her to consume her own.

"It is too delightful to have you in town, my love," she says. "I never expected such bliss."

"Nor I," answers Dorothea nibbling her muffin. "After all, there is only one place in the world, is there?"

"Only one," says Flora as devoutly as the Turk subscribes to his religious belief. "By the way, Thea, I've been wanting to ask you ever so many times—was there really anything between your sister and Duke Vereker?"

"He wanted to marry her," replies Dorothea simply.

"Fancy Duke whom no one ever could catch!" exclaims Flora pausing with her cup half-way to her lips.

"Then of course," she continues, "it's only a question of time?"

"Oh, I don't know," returns Dorothea with a shade of impatience. "He's off to America now. Probably before he returns, he will have found his senses and won't give her a chance again."

"But, my dear, why did you not *make* her accept him?" inquires Flora, opening her eyes.

"Make!" retorts Dorothea. "You don't know her. She's a sort of Red Indian, a wild woman of the woods. She hasn't the slightest sense of decency or propriety. Besides, it was all done and he was sent about his business before I knew anything of it. It was Bel's fault. He took some ridi-

culous idea into his head about her being too young to marry."

"Good Heavens!" cries Flora aghast at this Vandalism; "as if a girl could be too young or too anything else to marry a man with eighty thousand a year! But tell me," she pursues, "people are such awful story-tellers one never knows what to believe, I heard it was Angie Beauclerc's doing. They say she got Cis Deerbrook to make love to her and put her off Duke."

"Nonsense," returns Dorothea a trifle sharply and blushing a little. "Nothing of the sort. I asked him myself to Red Meade."

"That was rather weak of you," rejoins Flora, "knowing what Cis is."

"How could I tell," cries Dorothea with exasperation, "that the girl was such an idiot? I asked him for my own amusement because I was bored to death."

"And she fell in love with him?"

"I don't know what she did," says Lady Belhaven cutting herself a little wedge of plum cake. "I never asked her. It's a dreadful nuisance having a girl tacked on to one whose ideas are not human. However, I don't mean to be worried with her. Bel has taken her in hand and I shall leave her entirely to him. She's a Quixote in petticoats and that just suits him."

"*Apropos* of Cis," remarks Flora, "his little ways

have been getting him into hot water again. He had to leave Cannes rather in a hurry. He was never away from Jane, and Mr. Stormont heard of it and went out there and I believe there was a tremendous row."

Her ladyship bethinks her of the "tremendous row" there had been at Red Meade on account of this Lovelace but she does not feel disposed to confide it to her friend.

At this moment the door is thrown open and Mrs. Beauclerc is announced. Both ladies rise and receive her with the greatest *empressement.* Mrs. Verschoyle likes her, likes her parties and Mr. Vereker's, and Dorothea has made up her mind that Angie is a person to be propitiated in every possible way.

Angie is anxious to disabuse Lady Belhaven's mind of the idea that she has been instrumental in separating Duke from her sister, and, besides, she admires Dorothea heartily as she does every beautiful woman. So the *entente cordiale* is perfect between the three ladies.

"Have you heard from Mr. Vereker lately?" asks Mrs. Verschoyle when she has supplied Angie with tea. "Where is he? I miss him dreadfully. I am so sorry he is gone. What restless creatures men are!"

"My husband heard this morning," answers Angie naturally. "He likes America and talks of

being away another couple of months. Or it is possible that he may stay on and fish in Canada—he wants Captain Beauclerc to join him."

"But that won't suit your husband, I'm sure," cries Flora.

"No," laughs Angie—"it is too far from Pall Mall." Then turning to Dorothea she says,

"Have you heard that Cis Deerbrook is going to marry Miss Lane?"

"Not really!" cry both ladies at once.

"He told me so himself only yesterday," returns Angie.

"Poor Cis!" ejaculates Mrs. Verschoyle. "That means indeed that he has come to the end of his tether. Of all the odious, vulgar women! I positively detest the sight of her. She does not care what she says: I cannot conceive how she ever got into society at all."

"Oh," remarks Dorothea, "—— took her up and said she was rather good fun. That is enough to *lancer* anyone."

"Do you know how much she has?" inquires Flora.

"Twelve thousand a-year," replies Angie. "Fortunately she treats it quite as a commercial affair, and is prepared to pay his debts and to make a very handsome settlement upon him. But she has a capital head and has made her arrangements so that good behaviour on his part will be compulsory."

"Oh," says Flora, "if his fortune depends on that, I expect he will soon be as poor as ever again."

"But," says Angie laughing—"she is very practical—sensible, he calls it. She gave him distinctly to understand that as long as he treated her with proper respect, she had not the smallest objection to his continuing to exercise his little *penchant* for flirtation. She is 'a good fellow,' Cis says—he doesn't look upon her as a woman at all, and thinks she will suit him admirably."

"He is quite right in one thing," exclaims Flora: "she is not like a woman, but a man in petticoats. She is hardly ever out of the saddle—she has her own gun and carries it herself: I believe she wears a kilt in Scotland. And she says 'By Jove!' and 'By George!' and I believe has been heard to swear at her groom like a trooper."

"Poor Cis!" says Lady Belhaven quite pathetically. "I suppose nothing but sheer necessity has driven him to this dreadful step."

"His brother won't pay another shilling for him," answers Angie. "And I believe his creditors were getting rather troublesome. He does not seem at all unhappy."

And here she smiles a little half scornful, half amused smile, for if she likes Cis personally, she despises his character none the less.

"But there are nice women with money," says

Dorothea in a regretful tone. "Poor Cis! how dreadful for him!"

Angie does not stay very long, and when she takes her leave Lady Belhaven, in the prettiest, most *empressé* manner, begs that she will lose no time in coming to see her. She has made up her mind that it is very desirable to have Angie for a friend.

"Isn't she clever!" exclaims Flora the moment the door has closed upon her. "Did you notice she would not say that *she* had heard from Duke?"

"Yes; and what a sweet frock! Paris, I am sure. How well she puts on her clothes. After all, there is nothing like black—any black at least that is not mourning."

"Do you know," observes Flora, "when I'm with her, I always rather believe in her. I wonder if there really is anything between her and Duke."

"Why, of course. How absurd you are!" answers Dorothea. "Or if there isn't now, there has been. Well," looking at the clock, "it's a great bore, but I suppose I must be going."

"Oh! no, no," cries Flora, "indeed you must not. I have ten thousand things to say to you. You must stop another hour at least."

Lady Belhaven re-settles herself in her chair. A minute later Sir Henry Cheshunt is announced, and shortly afterwards Dorothea reiterates that she must go.

"Must you really?" says Flora. "Well, my love, if it is inevitable!"

Then they kiss and promise to meet on the morrow, and Dorothea reluctantly leaves the warmth and beauty and comfort of her friend's room. She shivers as she goes through the keen air to her brougham; a sudden gust fills her eyes with dust and straw—the footman's hat is nearly blown off.

"What a loathsome night!" she mutters, pulling up the window with a jerk.

About half-way through dinner, she suddenly bethinks her of her news. It will please Belhaven, she reflects, and will be a dreadful blow to Cilla, which gives a double edge to the pleasure of retailing her gossip.

"I have such a piece of news," she says gaily, looking over at her lord. "Some one is going to be married. Guess."

To please her, Belhaven makes one or two guesses, after which he gives it up.

"It is Cis!" she cries, and at her words a horrible feeling of sickness and faintness comes over Cilla; a chill seizes her heart, a knot rises in her throat, and if her life depended upon it, she could not swallow another morsel.

Dorothea makes a point of not looking at her sister, but Belhaven's eyes involuntarily turn to the child and he sees with keen sympathy that she is suffering.

"Ah!" he says indifferently. "Whom is he going to marry?"

"That horrid Hannah Lane! She is the most atrocious vulgarian! Did you ever meet her? She did not know a soul five years ago, but Mrs. Vaughan took her up, and now she goes everywhere."

"I don't remember her," answers Belhaven. "I suppose she has money."

"Twelve thousand a year, Angie Beauclerc says. I met her to-day. She had heard from Duke—he may be away two months more or all the season."

Cilla dares not stir nor speak—she sits with downcast eyes and a terrible load at her heart waiting until dinner shall be over and the order of release given by her sister. But Dorothea is in no haste to-night—she sips her port with evident enjoyment, and eats sponge cakes and peels a pear which she amiably divides with her lord. Belhaven has a kindly longing to set the poor captive free, but fears to let her think he is aware of her pain by suggesting that she shall leave the table.

At last Dorothea comes to an end of her dessert, dips her fingers into the ruby bowl beside her, daintily dries them and pushes back her chair.

"I think," says Belhaven as she enters the drawing-room hanging affectionately upon his arm, Cilla having fled away to her room—"I think, my darling, you should not have said that about Cis quite so suddenly before the poor child."

"I did it on purpose," replies Dorothea exultantly. "It will do her good. Now she will know

it is no use having any more ridiculous ideas about him."

"Poor little girl!" utters Belhaven tenderly. "By the way, where did you see Mrs. Beauclerc?"

"Oh!" answers Dorothea, "I just dropped in for an instant at Flora's to ask her for an address and Angie came in."

Belhaven's brow clouds.

"I do *not* like the idea of your being always with Mrs. Verschoyle," he says. "I have heard very queer things about her."

"Oh, I see very little of her," answers Dorothea mendaciously.

"The less the better," rejoins her lord.

It is three days after this when Mrs. Beauclerc, in accordance with Lady Belhaven's earnest request, comes to call in Grosvenor Street. It is rather late in the afternoon and Dorothea is trying on a dress. She sends her maid to Cilla with an imperative request that she will at once go down to the drawing-room and entertain the visitor until she is disengaged.

Cilla whose heart has of late been ravaged by so much stronger emotions than any mere small jealousy, goes to meet Mrs. Beauclerc with no particular feeling. She says politely but neither warmly nor coldly that her sister is engaged for a few minutes with the dressmaker but will not be very long, and then rings the bell and orders tea.

Angie has thought not unfrequently about Cilla of late—in her gratitude to Duke for his goodness, she feels a sincere desire to do anything that might be pleasing to him—she knows it would be welcome to him to hear of any *rapprochement* between her and his young love. Finding herself suddenly alone with Cilla and noting the melancholy look in the girl's eyes, a sudden kindness warms her heart and she acts for the second time in the last few weeks on an impulse.

"I wish," she says in the softest accents of her pleasant voice, and with the kindest glance from her brown eyes, "that you and I might be friends. Perhaps people have spoken unkindly of me to you and have warned you against me—if so, do not believe them. I am Mr. Vereker's oldest and best friend—he is so good and kind and I like him so much that I would do anything in the world to further his happiness. And, for his sake, I should like to know you better, and I think for your own sake too."

And not only is Angie's voice winning but she looks so kind and honest and sincere that Cilla's heart goes out to her then and there, and impulsively, with the tears standing in her eyes, she gets up, goes towards her and stretches out her hand.

Then Angie, whose own eyes are not quite dry, kisses the girl's cheek and pressing her hand says in a voice of whose sincerity it would be quite impossible to doubt,

"Indeed you may trust me. And I hope we shall be the very best of friends."

When Lady Belhaven comes hurriedly in, she finds Angie sitting with the pug in her lap and Cilla beside her on the sofa talking with the utmost animation.

"What a fool that girl is!" says her ladyship to herself; "she seems to be fair game for anyone."

But for once Cilla had formed a just estimate of another human being.

CHAPTER V.

ANGIE and Cilla became great friends after this. Angie saw that Lady Belhaven interested herself but very little in her sister and that the girl would be all the better for the softening influences and companionship of her own sex. She invited Cilla to lunch and to drive with her and took her now and then to the play; for Duke, before he left, had given orders at his library that a box for some theatre, whichever she selected, should be sent once a week to Mrs. Beauclerc. The more Angie saw of Cilla, the more she liked, admired, sympathised with her, and as for Cilla, her heart was always ready to bow before some idol or other, and she began to feel that extravagant affection for Angie that young girls

sometimes bestow on older women. Angie found her sincerity and impulsiveness refreshing. It was never gushing. She loved the girl's voice too and it gave her the greatest enjoyment to sit in the twilight, buried in her chair, listening to Cilla's tender, pathetic tones as she sang. And she had the pleasure of reflecting that she was doing what would be pleasing to Duke, and she wrote often and much to him about his young love whom she was able to think of now as the future Mrs. Vereker without any of the old heart-burnings. For she felt quite sure that, in due course, when Duke came back, he and Cilla would be reconciled, and whenever she had an opportunity, she spoke of his kindness, his generosity, his many virtues, and Cilla listened with tolerable complacency and without showing any disposition to dissent.

Cilla did not take to Captain Beauclerc at all, which, at first sight, seems strange, as most women liked him and he always took pains to please them. And although he considered his wife a great fool for taking up the girl so warmly and having her perpetually at the house, he had such an opinion of her cleverness that he thought there might perhaps be some motive which he could not see and which she did not choose to confess. There is one dreadful thing about the world's children: they are always seeking for selfish motives behind every apparently kind or good-natured action. Their motto, to which

they admit of no exception, is that "no one does anything for nothing."

Algy had a somewhat boisterously hearty and genial manner. He seemed to be always overflowing with smiles and kindness and the desire to serve his friends. He called most of the men he knew by their Christian names, and a good many of the women too, and adopted a familiar, half lover-like, half-brotherly manner towards the latter which they nearly all found pleasing. The general impression of everyone about him was that he was "a thorough good fellow," a man whom it would be quite safe to ask to do anything for you, even to lend you money, only they did not make their request of him because "poor old chap! he was always hard up himself." But Cilla was amazingly keen-sighted about some things, and, if she cared for a person, very jealous for him or her. Therefore when she saw Captain Beauclerc's slighting behaviour to his wife and remarked the rough, impatient tones in which he occasionally addressed her, she very soon saw through the thin coating of his false *bonhomie* and appraised him at his true value. She disliked the extravagant compliments that he paid her and the mingled air of gallantry and familiarity by which he sought to fascinate her, for, young as she was, she had a strong feeling that insincere homage and fulsome praise are an insult to the understanding of a woman who has any dignity.

Algy was not very long in discovering that his charms were lost upon Cilla—that she did not care for nor like him, so, although he continued to be civil outwardly to her, he, being intensely vain, took an extreme dislike to her in his heart, and seldom lost an opportunity of damaging her in the eyes of other people when he could do so without seeming to be ill-natured.

Lady Belhaven was never weary of speculating what sinister motive Angie had in the background for taking Cilla up with this sudden warmth, and was quite angry with her husband for saying one day that he believed she had no motive at all but that she liked the girl genuinely, as indeed anyone might do.

Cilla, under the influence of her new and delightful friendship, grew brighter and happier than she had been for a long time. Cis was fast becoming only a memory with a gentle little halo of melancholy about it.

But one evening she and Angie went to the play together. Captain Beauclerc and another man were to join them later—there were very few plays or other attractions that could get Algy away from his wine and cigar after dinner.

The first act of the piece was about half over when a rustle in the stalls made Cilla look round with a shade of impatience at the disturbers of this interesting performance. Then her heart stood quite

still for a moment as she saw who the new-comer was. It was Cis Deerbrook. Thenceforth the play was no longer anything to her—there was but one actor present, and he was certainly not on the boards.

Cis, when he had time to look round the house, saw her and gave her his sweetest smile and bow which she returned with such lightning from her expressive eyes, that the man beside him, who was looking up at the moment, exclaimed,

"Jove! Cis, there's some one pleased to see you! Devilish fine eyes! Who is she?"

"She's Lady Belhaven's sister," Mr. Deerbrook replied.

"Oho! What, the girl who threw Duke Vereker over for you, eh?"

For the story has circulated, thanks to Duke himself and to his friend Algy.

Cis is vain although he has the grace not to exhibit his weakness—it has been the reverse of disagreeable to him to be twitted about Cilla's having given up a man with eighty thousand a year for his sake—he feels quite tenderly to her, poor little thing!

So as soon as the act is over, he goes to Mrs. Beauclerc's box. Though Angie likes him, she is ill-pleased to see him here on the present occasion —she feels that it is a sin against her friendship for Duke to receive him, but, after all, she cannot

turn him out. Cis has been there about five minutes when Algy and his friend come in.

"Don't move, old chap," exclaims Algy, delighted at seeing him there, and, as usual, giving his wife credit for this excellent piece of diplomacy. "I'm off to the club. I can't stand this rot. I've seen it before. Keep my place and I'm very much obliged to you into the bargain."

And, accordingly, there Cis remains the whole evening, and Cilla is in a rapturous sort of trance in which the music and his voice, a sweeter music still, blend, and she drinks poison at every moment in long draughts from his eyes. She is reckless—she cares not that these two hours of bliss may be paid for by months of anguish. She forgets that he belongs of right to another woman—she gives herself up to the intoxication of the hour.

For his part, Mr. Deerbrook finds it extremely soothing to his self-love to be the object of this young creature's adoration—the woman whom he is going to marry is the coarsest, most practical, least imaginative of her sex. Although he regards the arrangement entirely from a commercial point of view, he cannot, for he has refined instincts, but be *froissé* by her, and, as he has been compelled to see a good deal of her lately, the change to this *spirituelle* æsthetic young girl is eminently agreeable. He has heard Miss Lane aver frequently that "love is gammon," and when a sense of fine feeling has

prompted him to make some little show of devotion to her, she has chaffed him unmercifully, and told him in so many words that she is quite ready to let him off "that part of the business." And Cis has always had an irresistible *penchant* for flirtation and love-making, and, since his engagement and that disagreeable little affair with Lady Jane and Lady Jane's husband at Cannes, he has been rather by way of putting restrictions upon his favourite diversion.

So to-night, although he does not say a word of love to Cilla, being restrained therefrom by *his sense of honour*, he yet manages to convey all sorts of tender imaginings to her foolish heart and to send her to her pillow with the belief that she is the being whom he loves and that this dreadful marriage is only a sacrifice to stern necessity.

Angie is seriously vexed—she sees quite well what is going on, but what can she do? She is obliged to seem unobservant and to talk to the man who sits behind her chair. Shall she, later on, warn Cilla and remonstrate with Cis! But the mischief is already done, and, however yielding Cilla might be on other subjects, she is pretty sure to be tenacious about this one in which all her heart is absorbed. Angie has other reasons for feeling vexed. Miss Harcourt is in the stalls—she has decidedly a *mauvaise langue:* she will be sure to spread the report far and wide of Cis being in the box with Miss

St. George and herself, and will, of course, give her credit for having not only connived at but probably arranged the meeting.

When she and Cilla are in the brougham, Angie is greatly minded to say a word of caution, of reminder to the girl that Mr. Deerbrook is no longer a free man, but no one knows better than she does the golden properties of silence and so she refrains. But she gives her an unwontedly tender pressure of the hand as she bids her good night in Grosvenor Street, forecasting well enough what sorrow is in store for that elated, beating young heart which is so full of joy and triumph to-night.

"Good-night, dearest Mrs. Beauclerc," cries Cilla, "I have had such a delightful evening," and she trips upstairs to bed, and whilst her maid is brushing out her hair, has, contrary to her custom, not a word to say to her, so lost is she in the raptures of retrospect. She knows Cis is going to marry an heiress, yet somehow the knowledge does not grieve her to-night.

Three afternoons later, she is walking in company with her maid and the pug down the almost deserted Row. She goes there oftenest because the pug can have his freedom and roam about at large, whereas he abhors the shops and the crowded thoroughfares where he gets kicked and hustled and frightened. And as Cilla walks briskly along with a faint flush from healthful exercise on her cheek,

whom should she meet but Cis Deerbrook strolling up with another man! In the unceremonious manner which men use to each other, he unlinks his arm from his friend's and turning, joins Cilla. The maid falls discreetly behind. Most maids are well-disposed and obliging towards any man whom they regard as a "follower," and Dawson is no exception. Nor does she dream that this handsome gentleman is the Mr. Deerbrook of whom there had been so much talk in the "Hall" at Red Meade, who, as every servant in the place knew, had won Miss Cilla's heart and caused words between his lordship and my lady, and who had been the means of getting Mr. Vereker sent about his business.

The stroll was a long one—to the end of the Row and across into Kensington Gardens, past the Memorial, then along the broad walk and back again the same way.

The maid's legs began to ache, and she felt the want of her tea—the night too was coming on apace—it was very well for Miss Cilla, no doubt, but she might have a little more thought for other people.

Cilla has indeed lost all count of time. Cis has been talking to her about himself—his embarrassments, the selfishness of his brother and the compulsoriness of this marriage which, he does not disguise from her, he looks forward to with dread and misgiving. He does not say it in so many

words, but he lets her think by glance and innuendo that, were he free to choose, it would be on her that his wandering love would light and settle. He talks of sympathy and fate and a hard destiny; speaks with the false sentiment that is so alluring to young, innocent minds, and makes the girl think him a hero and a demi-god instead of the selfish, unprincipled man he is. It amuses him; it passes an idle hour pleasantly—he has suffered so little for love's sake himself that perhaps he is not really conscious of the heinous cruelty he is committing.

The poor child is like one in a dream—she can think of nothing, of no one else. When she sings in the evening at Belhaven's request there is a new accent of passion in her voice that, whilst it charms, half frightens him. What can it mean! He has not the faintest idea that Deerbrook is in town nor that Cilla has seen him: he has forbidden him the house and banished him from his thoughts. Could he but know that the girl has been walking with Cis all the afternoon, and that Dorothea met him yesterday at Mrs. Verschoyle's, what would he not have said and thought about the deceitfulness of women! Her ladyship had told Cis playfully that he must not call in Grosvenor Street, for her lord and master had forbidden her to receive him, and this had enhanced his pleasure in walking with Cilla —he had felt, with a sense of triumph, that he was stealing a march on "that jealous fool, Belhaven."

When Cilla went up to her room that night, she found a box on her dressing-table.

"It came about half an hour ago, Miss," said Dawson, who had the natural aptitude of her order for intrigue, with a significant smile. "I thought I might as well bring it straight up here."

What could it be! Cilla's eyes glistened with impatience and her fingers trembled as she unfastened it, though what possible reason could she have for fancying that it came from Cis? With a little cry of rapture, she took out of the cotton wool which enclosed them some dozen of the rarest, purest white flowers, and then something that to the girl's eyes was more fair and lovely still, a little sprig of blue forget-me-not.

When her maid was gone, she pressed this sweet emblem to her lips and heart a thousand times, and her eyes were dim with a strange joy.

A woman of fashion may have fifty trophies of flowers from her adorers and toss them aside with scarce a thought or a look, but the young girl who gets for the first time such a token from the man she loves, prizes his offering beyond all words. If every petal of this little emblematic sprig had been a diamond, it would have had not one whit more value in Cilla's eyes. She placed it alone in a glass of water—later it was to be dried, preserved, flattened, cherished; perhaps buried with her; but for a little yet it was to gladden her eyes by living.

And there she sat by her fire, dreaming all manner of sweet, innocent, childish, impossible dreams until the clock struck one and a sudden shiver reminded her that she had let her fire out.

The next afternoon she had promised to go to Mrs. Beauclerc. When she entered that lady's drawing-room, a stranger was sitting there; a loud-voiced and mannered woman, with a fine figure displayed by a very tight and well-fitting gown of a somewhat *voyant* colour. Angie at once presented her guests to each other.

"Miss Lane. Miss St. George."

Cilla made a small stiff bow. Miss Lane bestowed a good-humoured, half-contemptuous nod upon her in return. She had heard a little about Cilla, but merely thought of her as a child, a schoolgirl. For her part, Cilla felt the most violent repugnance to the betrothed of Cis. Oh, Heavens! this vulgar coarse creature the betrothed of such a being! and going to the fire-place, she took up Duke's terrier, Jack, which had found an asylum with Angie in his master's absence and seated herself at an unconversational distance from the other pair.

Miss Lane's voice however would have made itself heard in an adjoining room with the door shut. At the moment of Cilla's entrance, Angie had been asking when the wedding was to take place.

"I don't know, I'm sure," she answered with her loud, mirthless laugh. "As soon as hunting's over I suppose. Certainly not before. Love must wait for sport. Not that there's very much love about the matter."

"Oh!" said Angie politely, "you must not say that."

"I never make any bones about telling the truth," rejoined the heiress, showing all her large regular teeth. "Cis and I understand each other quite well. He wants my money and I've come to the conclusion that a woman now-a-days has no position without a husband; no freedom, no anything. And I hate the sheep-dog business—always dragging a wretched woman about after me as if I couldn't jolly well take care of myself."

"Yes. I think it quite right that girls should marry," assented Angie.

"And Cis and I will suit each other very well. I might have bought a title of course, but then my money would have been wanted to keep up the family place or something, and Cis only wants to amuse himself and has nothing to keep up. I shan't interfere with him, and I'll take precious good care he don't interfere with me."

"Is Mr. Deerbrook in town?" inquired Angie wishing to spare Cilla's feelings.

"Oh yes, he's been with me all the morning. I tell him there isn't the least necessity for him to be

always running after me like a little dog, but he seems to think it is the correct thing and it pleases him and don't hurt me. The frost brought me up. I hope to goodness it isn't going to last, but it has given me the opportunity of ordering my clothes."

Miss Lane rises to go.

"Now mind, Mrs. Beauclerc," she says in parting, with a hearty, mannish grip of the hand, "when Cis and I are tied up you are to come and stay with us. I shan't take any denial, and Cis doats on you. And bring your husband, because he's a capital fellow, and exchange is no robbery, you know."

Then, with a half nod to Cilla, Mr. Deerbrook's betrothed goes out.

"My dear child," cries Angie returning to Cilla as the door closes, "you must positively not say so much with those eyes of yours. Do you know that you were looking at Miss Lane as if she were some noisome reptile!"

Cilla is covered with confusion, but her disgust is even greater than her shame.

"She is the most dreadful, vulgar, horrid person I ever saw!" she cries almost passionately. "Oh! how can he!—how can he!"

"He is poor and extravagant and in debt," replies Angie quietly. "When a man does not know how to earn his living and would not if he could, and when he values pleasure and comfort more

highly than anything else, what is he to do but accept the only chance that is offered him?"

Cilla is silent. Is Angie blaming Cis? For a few minutes the girl's love for her hostess suffers a slight diminution.

CHAPTER VI.

Four days passed and Cilla neither saw nor heard anything of Mr. Deerbrook. She thought of nothing else, dreamed of nothing else. Since she had seen Miss Lane, his marriage seemed like some awful impending catastrophe, the thought of which was almost too grievous to be borne. She endowed Cis in her heart with her own fine, sensitive imagination, and fancied that he must shrink with horror from the idea of this union as she would do were she promised to some coarse, vulgar man. All manner of vague ideas swept through her brain. She was utterly ignorant of the value of money. She had not, in her agitation, heard Dorothea announce the amount of Miss Lane's income, and her own six hundred a year seemed riches to her. Oh! if she could but give it to her lover, and live for ever after on the meanest fare and without thought or care for fine apparel or the elegancies of life. Let him

spend the money and she be his humble drudge and slave!

On the afternoon of the fifth day, she went at five o'clock to drink tea with Mrs. Beauclerc. And as her cab drew up to the kerb, who should be standing on the door-step but Mr. Deerbrook. He looked genuinely pleased to see her, and her poor little heart palpitated with a sudden and violent delight.

"Mrs. Beauclerc is not in, and I was just going away," he says.

"If you please, Miss," utters the butler advancing, "I was to say will you come in and Mrs. Beauclerc will be back very soon."

"Then I shall come in too and keep you company," says Cis, helping her out; not ill-pleased to feel the tremulousness of her little hand.

So they go upstairs together into Angie's lovely drawing-room where beauty and comfort are so harmoniously married.

"Did you get my flowers?" he asks tenderly, and she answers with her lips,

"Oh! indeed I did; thank you a thousand times," and her great eloquent eyes say much more.

"You don't know what trouble I had to get that forget-me-not," says Cis. "And you won't forget me, will you?" in a low voice and looking tenderly at her.

Her lips quiver—she cannot speak, but indeed words are unnecessary when a person has such ex-

pressive eyes. Cis knows that he is doing wrong—the very fact gives a gentle stimulus to his pleasure, and, for the moment, he feels rather in love with this charming, sensitive, refined creature. He has come straight from the hotel where his betrothed is staying, in rather a disgusted frame of mind—she has alluded jocularly and with the worst possible taste to the *raison d'être* of their marriage before two or three mutual friends, and he has been made to look and to feel small—sensations disagreeable to everyone, but how much more so to a man used to be flattered and admired and courted.

"And so," he says, standing between Cilla and the firelight so that his beautiful Greek profile comes into full relief, though this is purely accidental on his part, "I hear you have seen my—my *fiancée*," with a slightly contemptuous accent.

"Yes," answers Cilla.

"Well," looking at her, "and what do you think of her? I am a fortunate man, am I not?"

And Cilla, seeing his look and feeling so bitter on the subject, cries,

"How *could* you!"

There is a volume of reproach in her voice.

He makes an impatient gesture and turns to the fire.

"What can a poor devil like me do!" Then with sudden disgust, "I wish to God I was well out of it!"

Then he droops his handsome head and stares with a melancholy air into the fire.

A wild tumult is going on in the child's heart—some unknown power seems to force her to speak, whilst another holds her back. Then she says in a low, quivering voice and clasping her slender hands tight together,

"Is it *so much* money that you owe?"

He turns, struck by the emotion in her voice, and, in an instant, reads her thought in her face.

He acts on an irresistible impulse of passion and tenderness. She has risen to her feet, and he puts one arm round her and takes her hands in his with the other. Poor child! she takes it for a sign that he accepts her as yet unspoken offer.

"I have money," she says in a low, hurried voice, whilst her beautiful eyes look into his with the rapture of one who sacrifices all to his heart's beloved. "Oh, will you not take mine? everything I have. I could do quite well without."

"God bless you, my darling!" he murmurs, more moved than he has been this many a year and with a purer, better feeling, and he kisses her hair and cheek, but, by some strange instinct, holds her lips sacred—"it would be too much happiness to have you and what I must have to save me as well."

"Why?" asks Cilla eagerly, thinking he will not sacrifice her for her own sake. "I have six hundred a-year," she adds.

Cis could almost smile only that he is really moved.

"My poor little darling!" he says—"that would only be a drop in the ocean. Why, my debts are more than all your fortune."

Cilla draws back. A sudden chill creeps over her—a sudden shame—an instinct that there has been something ridiculous as well as immodest in her thus offering herself.

"Don't turn away from me, child," cries Deerbrook tenderly. "I shall never, never forget how good and kind and sweet you have been! My own little darling!"

He softly strokes her hair and presses her hand and a mingled feeling of happiness and misery sweeps over the girl's heart and she bursts into an agony of tears.

"Hush! for God's sake hush! Don't cry, my sweet little love!" cries the young man sincerely shocked and grieved at her distress.

At this moment a thundering knock comes at the door, and, terrified, Cilla starts away from the arms that shelter her. Where shall she hide her grief, her shame!

"What can you do?" cries Cis no less concerned. "Stop! in there!"

There is a tiny third room off the drawing-room which Angie makes a china closet of—it has no door but is unlighted and the darkness will hide her.

A moment later Mrs. Beauclerc enters.

"Where is Miss St. George?" she says as she greets Cis. "They told me she was here."

He puts his finger with a warning gesture to his lips and glances in the direction of the little room.

It is with a sense of utter dismay that Angie grasps the situation. She looks at him with an expression of the deepest reproach.

"How can you be so cruel, so unfair!" she says moved to indignation.

"Hush!" he answers in a low, agitated voice. "It was not my fault I swear. I am *more* than sorry. I don't know how it happened. It was my cursed ill-luck. I will explain to you another time —now the best thing is for me to go. Don't say anything to her, poor little girl! She's as good as gold and one in a thousand."

He makes for the door and Angie does not attempt to stop him. She is thoroughly vexed and miserable. This to have happened in her house of all others!

As the servant returns from opening the door, she calls to him not to bring tea until she rings: then she goes slowly upstairs to her room to take off her bonnet. She wants to give Cilla time to recover herself. She does not hasten over the operation; it is full ten minutes before she descends to the drawing-room, and then, as she expects, she

finds Cilla sitting there trying to look as if nothing had happened. She greets the girl in her usual kind manner and lifting the shaded lamp from the table puts it in the back room so that they are left in semi-darkness. Then she rings for tea, all the time chatting away about her drive and various other subjects. Angie has marvellous tact—not by a single glance or word does she give Cilla to think that she suspects anything, although the girl is aware that she must guess something of what has happened. If it were not for the shame of remembering that she has offered herself to Deerbrook, Cilla would like to throw herself on her knees beside her friend and tell her everything. They have been sitting perhaps a quarter of an hour when Lord Belhaven is announced. He has not been one instant in the room before Angie and Cilla know that something has happened. His manner is stiff, glacial to Mrs. Beauclerc; and he turns to Cilla without seating himself, saying that he had heard she was here and that as it was a fine evening he had thought he would fetch her and they might walk home.

And Cilla without more ado; a sickening sense of unknown dread at her heart; rose at once and began to put on her bonnet. Angie made one or two remarks: Belhaven answered her with the utmost brevity and in an icy, half-disdainful tone. What could it mean! When they were gone, she

racked her brain for reasons and felt thoroughly wretched and uncomfortable. But yet, how was she to blame for this luckless *contretemps*, and how came Belhaven to know that Cis had been there! For it was evident enough that he did know it.

Now this was the little freak that Fortune had amused herself by playing. Belhaven, having returned home rather earlier than usual, inquired for Cilla and was told that she had gone to drink tea with Mrs. Beauclerc, whereupon he bethought himself of going to fetch her going and having a chat with Angie whom he liked. He was within three doors of her house when a man came rushing out of it and, as they were at that moment close to a lamp-post, he recognized Deerbrook who, however, did not see him. His face wore a perturbed and agitated look. As a sudden, dreadful thought smote Belhaven, he stood stock still. Great God! was it possible? Could such infamy exist? Was Mrs. Beauclerc conniving at meetings between these two to serve her own base ends? Was there on the face of the earth such a fiend?

Belhaven walked on past the door, up the street, across Belgrave Square and into Sloane Street. He was a prey to the most violent rage. He did not dare to meet either Mrs. Beauclerc or Cilla at present. He would have been obliged to pour out all his contempt and loathing on the one; his anger and impatience on the other. He was quite con-

scious of the infirmity of his temper: and he was always trying to restrain the violence of feelings—for rage with him was, for the first few moments, indeed a madness. It was sometimes only by an almost superhuman effort that he could keep his hands off a person who angered him. He knew himself to be capable of almost anything in his first wrath; but only let a few minutes pass and he cooled down, and, after a time, it was really difficult for him to continue to cherish anger even when he knew it to be just and lawful. So he walked on and on, making all sorts of wrathful plans. Presently he calmed down and took a settled resolve. This time there should be no wavering nor hesitation on his part.

In spite of the comparative darkness of the room, his quick eyes saw the redness of Cilla's eyelids as he entered, but he did not feel the remotest pity for her; only a bitter anger. Mrs. Beauclerc's door had scarcely closed upon them when he said, turning and speaking in a voice that he in vain endeavoured to control,

"And so you have met Deerbrook again?"

She was silent.

"You have been alone with him," cried Belhaven, giving words to his suspicions.

Cilla's heart beat violently. She could not answer. But her silence was eloquent enough to her hearer.

"And pray," he asks with bitter contempt in his voice, "have you seen him before to-day since you came to London? Have you?" he repeats fiercely and Cilla feels compelled to answer.

"I met Mr. Deerbrook in the Park last week."

"And he spoke to you? walked with you I daresay?" fiercely.

Again Cilla relapses into silence and again Belhaven interprets it correctly.

"And before then?" he asks, calmly this time.

Cilla grows reckless. What does it signify? Life is over and done with. It holds no more, she thinks, for her, and then with a little feeling of triumph, she says to herself, He loves me. What does anything else in the world matter?

So she answers almost defiantly, throwing her head up,

"I met him at the theatre."

Belhaven relapses into silence. His rage is growing—he cannot trust himself to speak. Dorothea had been right, he thought bitterly. Why were the people always right who distrusted and suspected others! Dorothea had said that school was the only place for her sister. Dorothea had said that Mrs. Beauclerc had sinister motives in being friendly with Cilla. Dorothea had been right and he had been a blind, weak fool who had let pity get the better of his judgment. Ah! but now he had had

his lesson—now he would act very differently—now they should see with whom they had to deal.

Not one other word passed between the pair until they reached home. Cilla went straight to her own room and did not appear again that night—dinner was sent up to her, but she left it untouched.

She was in disgrace, she knew; persecution was impending over her, but she did not care—sweet was so subtly blended with bitter that she could hardly realise to herself whether she wast most wretched or most happy—the only thing that hurt her when she remembered it was that it was she who had taken the initiative, who had offered herself to her lover. But one so chivalrous, so noble as he would not misjudge her nor think the worse of her for that. And then she closed her eyes and once more felt his kisses on her hair and cheek, and fell into a trance of deepest joy at the remembrance.

It was about nine o'clock when her maid knocked at the door.

"A parcel for you, Miss," she said as she entered and lingered about for a minute or two, her suspicions being aroused to see her young mistress open it.

"Thank you," answered Cilla and laid it down, feeling, though she was quivering from head to foot with anxiety, that she could not open it before other eyes.

After a minute or two Dawson, provoked, went

out, and then, with a wildly beating heart, the girl proceeded to open her treasure.

Of course it was from him!

There was a letter, and what, to a young girl who loves, is so priceless as the words traced by her lover's hand? It is something to love, to keep, to cherish, to hug to her breast—a better reminder than anything else in the world. Thus, with eyes luminous with joy; with a heart throbbing with unspeakable delight she read.

"My own darling,

"I am more grieved than words can say to think of your being distressed on my account. But I shall never forget you, never. Think of me sometimes, sweet love, and wear this little remembrance I send you for my sake. Would God things might have been different.

"Yours, my child,

"C."

The remembrance was a locket, having a diamond heart in the centre set round with a wreath of beautifully executed forget-me-nots in pale blue enamel—it was a very pretty trinket indeed—it had a history besides—one that Cilla was never likely to know, or perhaps she would not have covered it with kisses nor have worn it day and

night against her heart, nor taken it stealthily out to look at and to worship.

Two years ago Cis had designed and caused this locket to be executed for one of his loves. When, six months later, he transferred his affections to the fair one's bosom friend, she had furiously flung back this gift and others, and he had thrown it in a drawer and forgotten it until to-night when, feeling very tender and remorseful towards his girl-love, he had thought to give her pleasure by presenting the token to her. And, not being endowed with very fine or delicate feelings, nothing had shocked nor revolted him in the idea of passing on this souvenir of a not very creditable intrigue to a pure and spotless young girl like Cilla. She, poor child! pressing it to her lips and heart by turns, felt as if with this dear token and those priceless lines she could face anything the future might have in store for her.

Meantime her doom had been settled by Belhaven downstairs.

"What is the matter?" Dorothea had said the instant she set eyes on her lord. And he, as he loved her and could not keep anything from her, poured out in a torrent of words all that had happened.

"Did I not tell you so?" cried her ladyship triumphantly. "I knew Cilla was not to be trusted. And as for Mrs. Beauclerc; of course she had de-

signs from the first. But what an infamous, unscrupulous wretch she must be!"

"Infamous, indeed!" groaned Belhaven. "Good God! to think any woman could be so devilishly wicked as calmly to plot the ruin of a girl's life for her own ends. And as for that infernal blackguard" (with fury), "he'd better not let me catch him in the mood I'm in or——"

"Nonsense," interrupted my lady coolly: "making an *esclandre* would be the very way to damage the girl for ever. You had better take care not to catch him."

"I shall go down to Brighton the first thing to-morrow," said my lord, "and the day after, she shall be safely settled there out of harm's way."

And, accordingly, the following morning, Belhaven, as good as his word, was in the train on his way to Brighton. He was quite angry with himself because a good deal of his rage had evaporated and he could not feel so bitter or revengeful against Cilla as he wished—indeed he was beginning to be a little bit sorry for her. She did not deserve any consideration, of course, but he should impress upon the lady who kept the school that she was to be treated with the greatest kindness, and he meant to ask as a great favour that she might be allowed to have her pug, which, he thought, would go a certain way towards reconciling her to her fate.

Mrs. Blank was a little surprised to receive

Lord Belhaven's visit, but none the less pleased. She thought that a Viscount's sister-in-law as a pupil would lend lustre to her establishment. So when he made a great point of the comforts he desired for Cilla, she even resolved to give up her own bed-room to the girl and took his lordship to see it, though she refrained from telling him of the sacrifice she was making. He had said at the first that he would begrudge no expense on her account.

Then, with a thousand apologies, he broached the subject of the pug, and, after very little demur, Mrs. Blank agreed to receive him also. Next Belhaven mentioned that he wished Miss St. George's maid to be near her in lodgings for a fortnight or so, that she might not feel quite deserted—he would like her also to walk out with his sister-in-law instead of her joining the other young ladies. Then —for he was as thoughtful and tender-hearted as a typical woman and as generous as a typical man —he went into the town, ordered various articles of comfort and adornment for Cilla's room, and desired a florist to send in flowers three times a week, knowing how passionately she loved them.

When, that evening, Dorothea rose to leave the dining-room and Cilla prepared to follow her, Belhaven laid a detaining hand on her arm.

"I want to speak to you," he said and she turned and faced him, prepared for anything.

"To-morrow," he said in a kind voice, "you are going with me to Brighton. You have made this step absolutely necessary. But I have arranged everything for your comfort and you will be allowed to take the pug."

At this, Cilla, who had been immoveable as a rock before, felt the tears spring to her eyes—then she ran away swiftly and left Belhaven standing there feeling like judge and executioner too.

A week went by after the events that happened in Angie's house and she was full of perplexity and uneasiness. She had written to Cilla twice and received no answer—she had called three times on Lady Belhaven at hours when she had made sure of finding her, and been met each time with the answer "Not at home." Then she wrote to her, but Lady Belhaven did not even acknowledge her letter. One evening her husband came in just before dinner and rushing upstairs to the drawing-room, burst out almost before he had time to shut the door.

"Well! you've made a pretty hash of it this time at all events. By Jove! it's possible to be just a little bit too clever!"

There was a look of mingled triumph and anger in his face; the look that he always wore when some piece of bad luck happened to Angie which he chose to aver she had brought upon herself.

Nothing pleased him more than to put her in the wrong. It is a fatal mistake for a woman ever to let her husband see that she feels herself superior to him—he never forgets nor forgives it. And, in spite of Angie's tact and knowledge of the world, there had been moments of anger when she had been unable to refrain from showing Algy that she felt contempt for him. He never lost an opportunity of paying her back.

"What do you mean?" she asked nervously, for she had been worrying herself not a little about the disagreeable *contretemps* that had happened to her.

"You know well enough what I mean," he answered roughly. "Your having that St. George girl and Cis here to meet."

"*I did not!*" cried Angie indignantly, "it was purely accidental. I was exceedingly annoyed about it."

"You may tell that to the marines," rejoined Captain Beauclerc coarsely. "I have just come from Flora Verschoyle who told me the whole story. The Belhavens are furious with you—there's no name bad enough for you, and 'pon my soul I don't wonder they're angry. They've packed the girl off to school—the best place for the little hussy, and a nice story they'll have for Duke when he returns. That reminds me, I heard from him this morning, and he'll be back in a fortnight. And, with all your

cleverness," sneering, "you'll be puzzled to make it all right with him this time."

And, with that, Captain Beauclerc went out and banged the door; leaving Angie to wonder in dumb misery why Fate should delight to heap vengeance on the innocent for the selfishness and cruelty of the guilty whom she allows to go scot-free.

CHAPTER VII.

When Lady Belhaven, without regret or pity, saw her sister depart, it did not occur to her that she would be at all likely to miss or to feel the want of her. She did not care for Cilla: they had nothing in common with each other. Dorothea detested emotional people who acted on wild impulses and put themselves into rages of anger or grief and made other people uncomfortable by their outbreaks. What if these same people had, not unfrequently, kind and generous hearts and were capable of sacrificing themselves for those they loved! The more foolish they if they did. "Everyone for himself" was a motto of which her ladyship thoroughly approved. She liked people to smile and to have a pleasant, unruffled manner, and thought it natural that every one, whilst his face smiled, should be turning over in his mind how to out-do and circumvent everyone else and to get his own way.

Before Cilla had been gone a week, however, Dorothea had occasion to miss her most severely. She only now realised that her sister had been the means of giving her the most complete and delight-

ful freedom. She had walked and ridden with Belhaven, accompanied him to lectures and galleries, listened to and sympathised with his queer, crotchety ideas, sung to him, sat with rapt attention of an evening whilst he read Byron or Shakespeare, and, in fact, by her companionship and attentions, saved Dorothea the trouble of amusing him, and the weariness of listening to and talking upon subjects that did not interest her. She cared neither for art, science, music, nor poetry; the only things she did care for were amusements, dress, pleasure, the company of a fast though highly-placed set of persons who spent their time in a spurious kind of love-making; in talking about each other, and in trying how fine a line they could draw in their conversation between decency and the other extreme. Dorothea had not dared to set out her own tea-tables yet nor to hold her own little afternoon assemblies, but Flora saved her the trouble and she met people at Mrs. Verschoyle's house to whom her husband would never willingly have opened his own doors. Not but that they were people of the highest fashion, but then those were the people of all others of whom Belhaven disapproved. He was not much of a hand at making friendships or acquaintances; there were, however, three or four people whom he liked sincerely, and, as it happened, these were all very musical and not of any great social importance.

My lady, therefore, because she had not been

anyone very particular herself, tiptilted her nose at those friends of her husband's and would have none of them. People who did not know her "set," could not talk her jargon, and failed to pronounce her Shibboleth were as aliens and pariahs to her. She would hardly waste a smile or a word upon them. On one occasion, two of these friends had dined with Lord and Lady Belhaven, and his lordship evidently spent an agreeable and, as he would have called it, a rational evening, but the moment they had taken their departure, Dorothea, with a most portentous yawn, exclaimed,

"My dearest Bel! if you love me, never ask those terrible people here again! They have nearly been my death."

Belhaven looked, as he felt, rather injured.

"It is a little hard that *I* cannot have any friends," he said.

"My dearest, darling love!" returned Dorothea —"who wants to prevent your having friends? Not I. I am too delighted. Go and live in their houses if you like, but for pity's sake don't ask them here unless you wish your Dorothea to give up the ghost."

Her ladyship was fond of rather extravagant expressions which, however, she uttered with a perfectly placid and imperturbable manner that made them very amusing to a third person when one was present.

Now that Cilla was gone, Belhaven, who missed her amazingly, turned to his wife for companionship. With the two sisters present together, all his aspirations had been gratified—he had feasted his eyes on his lovely wife and talked to Cilla on the many subjects which interested him, and received from her the fullest and most appreciative sympathy. Cilla was always ready to enter heart and soul into any scheme of benevolence, any plan for benefiting mankind morally, physically, or scientifically. Dorothea applied the sweeping and comprehensive term "rubbish" to all these things.

Belhaven, finding a good deal of his occupation gone with Cilla, tried to supply the want by Dorothea—he took to driving out with her, and persuaded her to go and look at pictures with him. She did not refuse; did not even look sulky; but she let him see in her pretty, placid way that she was frightfully bored, and he was sensitive enough to notice and to be pained by her want of interest. Sometimes, when they were driving together, he would take her hand and hold it, but gradually, without showing any emotion either of pleasure or distaste, she would re-possess herself of it, and he would feel hurt and mortified.

Dorothea was intensely provoked at having so much of his company—it prevented her going to Flora, and, at this season, when she could not enter very much into society on account of her mother's

comparatively recent death, the afternoons at Mrs. Verschoyle's were the greatest, she said, the only pleasures she had.

"My dearest love," she remarked one afternoon to her lord with a weary intonation—"have not you got clubs to go to like other men?"

"Does that mean that you want to get rid of me?" he cried almost passionately.

"Oh, no," she answered indifferently—"only, perhaps, if you went to your club, you would hear things and have something amusing to tell me at dinner."

"I am not a good hand at retailing scandal and gossip," he said coldly.

"No?" she returned listlessly.

But next day he took the hint and forbore to accompany her in her drive, and she went gleefully to tea with Flora.

Now Belhaven had sufficiently acute perceptions, and, when his passions of love and anger were in a quiescent state, a good measure of sound common sense—he knew the sort of woman that his beautiful Dorothea was, and read her character with praiseworthy discernment. He was perfectly aware that she was selfish; that she possessed very little feeling, and that her own pleasure and comfort were the sole objects of her study and interest. He had excellent theories about wives: he knew exactly the sort of woman morally whom he ought to have

chosen, but then, unfortunately, his passionate love of physical beauty came in and interfered. He had always entertained a horror of the fashionable married women of the day, looked upon them as the plague-spot of society, corrupting, festering, contaminating everything around them. The married woman who had lovers; whose photographs stood in shop windows; whose doings were chronicled in "society papers," was a creature for whom he had nothing but contempt and loathing—he had even harsher thoughts of and words for such women's husbands. When the possibility stared him in the face of his beautiful wife going to swell this new and abhorred phalanx, it drove him well nigh to frenzy, but they should find, he said to himself, that, in him, there was a very different sort of husband to deal with.

To him the word marriage had appeared to signify union, companionship, a small, intimate, happy circle of the same loves, ideas, and interests. To be father of children of whom a beautiful and beloved wife was mother, was in his eyes the crowning bliss of life, and that father and mother, sinking all selfish interests, should devote themselves to making their children happy, healthy, useful, good, seemed the highest, holiest, purest aim of existence.

This had been his theory—his practice had nipped all these exalted ideas in the bud. Dorothea, as he knew, was no more likely to fulfil his ideas of

motherhood than she was to perform any menial or domestic office in her household.

He thought all this remorsefully at times, but when her beautiful face was before him and she smiled upon him, he was fain to be content with her as she was, and to say to himself that no one has everything in this world.

For his own part, Belhaven would have been delighted to spend Darby and Joan evenings with his wife after Cilla's departure, but being, like all sympathetic persons, anxious to please, acutely sensitive to any symptom of weariness in his companion, he could not help feeling and knowing that his beloved one was bored. He cast about in his mind how to amuse her. He asked her whether he should read her some of Byron, and she answered "Yes, do," with as much show of interest as if he had demanded whether he should ring for coals. So, seating himself on a low chair near her, he began to read "The Giaour."

Reading aloud was rather an accomplishment of his—how often, when reading, had he suddenly looked up and found Cilla's eyes fixed upon him with an eloquent expression of pleasure, sadness, eagerness, whatever feeling was most suitable to the occasion—it had almost consoled him for the closed lids and nodding head of Dorothea. To-night he thought he would try whether he could not stir some emotion in this pretty Dresden statue. That was

what she most resembled—she was not grand nor grave nor cold like marble, but she was like the ever smiling, frivolous furbelowed porcelain figures which make such pretty drawing-room ornaments.

Belhaven read with all the passion and pathos that he could command. He was quite carried away himself, and then, as he finished, and his own heart was throbbing with emotion, he raised his eyes to see what effect he had produced upon Dorothea. She was regarding the fire with a placid smile; there was not the faintest evidence on her face that she had even heard him, as indeed she had not, for she was thinking what new frocks she would have when she discarded deep mourning and how soon it would be consistent with decency to leave off this funeral attire which was so horribly monotonous. So absorbed was she in reflection that she was not aware for a minute or two that her husband's voice had ceased. Belhaven, cruelly mortified, bent his head down over his book.

"Oh!" she said presently, "have you finished? Thanks. That was very nice."

"Do you happen to know what I have been reading?" he asked, and Dorothea, feeling that there was something wrong by the tone of his voice, smiled and said in a bland and apologetic voice,

"I'm afraid I didn't quite catch the last few lines."

Sometimes they went to the play, but my lady

found it dull work going alone with her husband. It looked so stupid and so "newly married;" other people made parties, which was far pleasanter. She mildly suggested this, but my lord did not take the hint kindly. Once or twice they dined out in a friendly way: Dorothea had decided not to go to any large parties until after Easter. One night they dined at the Verschoyle's, but Belhaven, on his return, expressed his disapproval of the *ménage* and the familiar and unceremonious behaviour of the guests. Mrs. Verschoyle was just the sort of woman whom he objected to and it was gall and wormwood to him to see his wife so intimate with her and so fond of her society. He knew it was rather a forlorn hope, but he made up his mind that he ought to talk very seriously to Dorothea and to tell her, as gently and affectionately as possible, what he considered the moral duties and obligations of a wife. Acting on the tradition of the ancients, he sought to propitiate his goddess first by an offering. He thought it rather mean and Jesuitical; however, it was a means to an end, and, besides, it always afforded him sincere pleasure to give to those whom he loved, and Dorothea had a very pretty, graceful way of receiving gifts and was always additionally smiling and complaisant for several days afterwards.

So Belhaven bought a diamond butterfly and presented it before dinner. It was just what she wanted, Dorothea vowed. He had the most ex-

cellent taste, and she gave him five or six kisses at least, and wore it on black velvet round her beautiful white throat at dinner. And Belhaven, a little ashamed of his artifice, talked in a lively strain all through their repast and gave no hint of the serious subjects upon which he proposed to discourse to her at a later period.

But when they were comfortably settled in the drawing-room, he, in his favourite position on a stool at her feet, he began to turn over in his mind how to approach this delicate matter.

Dorothea was in high good humour; she allowed her sultan and slave to hold her hand, to kiss it and to pay as much homage to her as he wished, and smiled at him in the prettiest, most affectionate manner in return. Husbands should always be encouraged to present diamonds to their wives, she thought.

"My darling," said Belhaven presently with a slight tremor in his voice, for it was far from pleasant to him at this moment to say a word to his beloved that might seem to imply the faintest reproach or disapprobation of her, only that he regarded it as a stern duty, "I want to say a word to you on rather a serious subject, may I?"

A chill feeling stole over Dorothea, but she still preserved her smiling face and answered, trying to speak gaily,

"Oh no, no, don't let us have any serious subjects. We are so happy as we are."

But Belhaven was not to be baulked thus.

"It is just because we are happy, darling," he said, "at least I am, that I dread anything happening to come between us and make us less happy. You are everything in the whole world to me," fervently. "I must tell you, sweet love, that I don't like you being with Mrs. Verschoyle. I don't want you to become one of her set—I don't want you to get into their ways. It would drive me mad to see you one of the fashionable married women of the day with half a dozen men about you and your name in everybody's mouth."

"Don't be silly, Bel," exclaimed Dorothea. "There is not the least chance of such a thing," and she added mentally, "Worse luck."

"You may not think so," he answered gravely, "but women drift so soon into that sort of thing. And if you knew," eagerly, "what contempt all right-thinking men have for such women, you would not care or wish to be one of them."

Dorothea's heart was growing very cold; the smile had quite faded from her face; even the butterfly could not stimulate her to any pretence of pleasure or interest in her lord's conversation.

He felt that she was vexed and was eager to soothe her ruffled feelings.

"I have only one object in life, my own darling,"

he said. "*I* want to make your happiness. I want you to feel that home is the centre of a woman's joys when she is married. I should like you to show these other women how charming it is to see a beautiful woman content with legitimate pleasures and winning every man's respect by her dignity and modesty. And if," his voice faltering, "we were so happy as to have children, I can think of nothing in heaven or earth so blessed as to devote ourselves to them; to make them the first object of our lives."

Dorothea had drawn her hand away from him and was staring into the fire with a stony gaze.

She hated children—the idea of being a mother was fraught only with terror and distaste to her—she looked upon it as the black side of the marriage which conferred freedom, rank and wealth upon a woman. Suddenly she made a gesture as though to shut out an abhorrent thought.

"Don't talk like that!" she said. "You give me the blues. You make me feel quite ill."

Then Belhaven, seeing the expression of her face, reluctantly dropped his discourse.

"Let us have a game of *écarté*," she said, and when they began to play, she resumed her smiles and her cheerfulness and he was fain to be content with what the hour yielded and to forget the defeat he had sustained.

The next afternoon, Dorothea, as she sat *tête-à-tête*

with her friend Flora, from whom she had no secrets, said,

"Oh, my dear, what a dreadful thing it is to have a serious husband!"

"I should think it must be," returned Flora, "though, thank Heaven, I don't know from experience."

"Bel is the very best creature in the world," proceeded her ladyship.

"I daresay," rejoined her friend. "But dull, my dear, mortally dull. The best creatures in the world always are. What is he worrying about now?"

"Oh, harping as usual on the 'fashionable married woman.'"

"That's pure jealousy," returned Flora.

"Of course it is. I am to be all in all to him —I am to find my *joys* in my home. What a truly inviting picture, isn't it!"

"My joys *are* in my home," said Flora laughing. "But they don't consist in the sole and undivided companionship of my husband. Now, Thea, take my advice—begin as you mean to go on—now is your time. If you give in to him at the outset, he will be your tyrant all your life, or, at all events, there will be constant struggles. Be as sweet as you like, but have your own way. Choose your own friends and amuse yourself in the way you like best."

"I dare not oppose him," said Dorothea. "As a rule he will do anything in the world for me, but when he flies into one of his passions, you have not the least conception of what he is."

"Then you must circumvent him somehow or other," answered Flora. "But, whatever you do, don't let him see that you are afraid of him—there is nothing so fatal as that."

Mrs. Verschoyle's warning was not without its effect. That very evening, when Belhaven asked his wife at dinner where she had been, she smilingly enumerated the shops she had visited and wound up with,

"I went to tea with Flora."

Belhaven's brow grew gloomy.

"It seems strange," he said, with manifest displeasure, "that you should go there so often when you know how I dislike and disapprove of her."

Then Dorothea, still smiling but with a slight quickening of her pulse, made answer.

"My dear Bel, you must really not treat me quite like a child. Flora and I have always been great friends. I cannot give her up because you choose to take a prejudice against her."

"It is not prejudice," retorted Belhaven hotly. "You know my reasons quite well. And you must care very little for me if you cannot give in to my wishes on a subject on which I feel so *very* strongly."

"It seems to me," answered Dorothea quite calmly, "that I shall care very little for you in time if you try to deprive me, as you seem anxious to do, of the very few pleasures and amusements that I have. I may be your wife, but I am not your slave."

Belhaven was utterly confounded and put to rout by the firm tone of his amiable and yielding Dorothea. He was positively unable to make any rejoinder, and from that time, to save himself pain, he forbore to ask his wife where she spent her afternoons.

Dorothea said to herself that Flora's advice had been excellent and that she would certainly let her husband see that she meant, in the matter of her friendships at all events, to have her own way.

CHAPTER VIII.

Duke returned from his travels towards the end of March, and the instant he arrived in London, went straight to Angie. There was so much to tell —so much to hear—he was so overjoyed at the sight of this beloved friend that he embraced her heartily and unrestrainedly in the presence of Algy, who was full of cordial joy and greetings too.

"There is no place like home!" cried Duke with the ineffable delight and complacency of the thorough Englishman returned to his own country; and the Beauclercs' house seemed more home to him than his mansion in Park Lane or the Court. The fatted calf had been killed for him. His favourite dishes had been ordered; Angie had apparelled herself beautifully and put his ear-rings in her ears, and Duke felt as happy as a king and forgot, for the time, that he was the victim of an unfortunate passion.

Algy, too, gave himself over undisturbed to the enjoyment of his dinner and the general conviviality of the hour, and it was only Angie who, though she looked so smiling and talked so gaily, was uneasy and perturbed in her mind.

She had resolved to be the first to tell Duke what had happened, and of the accusations which had been brought against her, and she could not help feeling that, though she was perfectly innocent, the case against her looked rather strong. What would Duke say? However fond he was of her, now that she only ranked second in his heart, he might allow himself to be prejudiced against her if the relations of the girl he loved tried to persuade him that she had been false to him and had connived at the meeting between Deerbrook and Cilla. That Cis should have spent a whole evening in her box at the theatre whispering to the girl; that he and Cilla should have been alone together in her drawing-room, were, to all appearances, very damning facts. The question was how strong was her influence over Duke? how strong was his faith in her?

Though Angie laughed and talked, she was full of suppressed nervousness and excitement. She was longing to have the explanation over. Once she might have said proudly, "If he choose to think ill of me, let him!" But now that he had been so good to her boy, her heart was full of affection for and gratitude to him, and no pain would be so cruel to her as to think that he could believe her capable of playing a traitor's part. The time which she spent alone in the drawing-room seemed perfectly interminable. She tried in turn to read, to play on

the piano, to work, but found it impossible to settle to anything. And every now and then the laughter of the men below fell on her ear and increased her impatient irritability.

Would they never come up? and she glanced for the fiftieth time at the clock which pointed to twenty minutes past ten. She was just about to ring and send a message to them when their voices, evidently approaching, greeted her ear.

The instant they came in she said to her husband,

"Algy, I have something particular to say to Duke. Would you mind leaving us for a few minutes?"

"All right," returned Algy pleasantly, and he went off to his den without more ado, thinking it very desirable that Angie should "square" Duke before the Belhavens got hold of him.

Duke stands with his back to the fire and looks down upon Angie with eyes that beam with affection and contentment.

"I *am* glad to see you again, my dear," he says. "The best part of going away is coming back."

And he holds out his hand to her and she gives it a kind little squeeze. Then the bright welcoming smile in her eyes fades and is replaced by an anxious look.

"Duke!" she begins earnestly, "I have something

to tell you. It is something I am afraid you won't like to hear. I wish I could have put off saying it, but it is better you should hear it from me than from anyone else."

In an instant his face becomes grave and his thoughts fly to Cilla. He has not forgotten her: he still thinks and hopes that some day things may come right, especially as Deerbrook is going to marry. Angie had conveyed that piece of news to him at once.

"Is it about—*her?*" he asks.

"Partly."

"Is she going to be married?"

"No, no, no!" cries Angie.

"Ill?"

"No, nothing serious in any way. Let me tell you the whole story. But first," her heart beating faster than usual, whilst she looks at him with her clear and honest eyes, "do you believe in me implicitly?—do you feel that you can trust me, even though, by my own showing, things look a little bit against me?"

"Need you ask?" he says, with simple loyalty.

"I will tell you from the beginning," and Angie speaks fast and with evident nervousness.

"You will hear me accused of all sorts of things, but what I shall tell you now is the *exact* truth."

Duke is mystified—he looks uneasily at her, wondering what can have happened to excite her

so painfully—to make her stand on the defensive to him.

"About two months ago," Angie begins, "the Belhavens came to town."

"Are they up now?" he interrupts eagerly.

"Ye-es—in Grosvenor Street. Soon after they arrived, I met Lady Belhaven at Mrs. Verschoyle's, and she was very civil and cordial and asked me to go and see her, which I did two or three days after. Her sister received me, and, as we were alone, I took the opportunity of saying to her that I hoped in spite of anything she might hear to the contrary, she would believe in my sincere wish to be her friend, for your sake and her own too."

"I am glad you said that," interrupts Duke, his face lighting up.

"Well—she received my little speech very nicely and we became friends at once."

"I am awfully glad," cries Duke, his eyes kindling still more. "I knew you two would take to each other if you were left to yourselves. You couldn't help it."

"After that," proceeds Angie, "as I saw that Lady Belhaven did not take much notice of her, I used to ask her here and drive her out and take her to the play."

"And did you not find her all I said?" cries Duke with enthusiasm. "Is she not clever and

charming, and has she not the most beautiful eyes in the world?"

"She is all you say," answers Angie kindly.

Then Duke throws himself into the chair beside her and listens with an air of intense interest.

"But now comes the unfortunate part," says Angie, looking away into the fire. "No one could be more innocent than I am and yet it looks as if it were through me it all happened. We were at the play together one night, Cilla and I, (I call her Cilla), when Cis Deerbrook came into the theatre."

A swift transformation takes place in Duke's face —he sees what is coming now.

"And," continues Angie, feeling very wretched at this point of her recital, "he came into my box."

"Why did you let him in?" says Duke reproachfully. "When you knew——"

"How can you stop a man from coming into your box," cries Angie impatiently, "when you know him intimately? And he was engaged to be married."

"Well," exclaims Duke, but you did not give him a chance of talking to her!"

"But he went and sat by her," cries Angie, "and I had a man talking to me. I could not go and drag him away, I suppose."

"Oh," utters Duke with an ominous change in his voice. "And how long did he stop?"

"Till the end of the play," returns Angie, bent on speaking the truth, cost what it may.

"Curse him!" says Duke bitterly. "But," reproachfully, "you who are so clever, who can manage anything—*surely* you might have done something."

"What could I have done?" impatiently. "I was as vexed and worried as you could have been, but when two people are talking quietly together, how *can* you interrupt them? But," hurrying on, "that is not the worst."

Duke throws himself back in his chair. He is indeed a different looking man from the radiant Duke of ten minutes ago.

"About a week after," Angie goes on, thinking she has never in her life felt so miserable and conscience-stricken, "Cilla came to tea with me. She arrived before I returned from my drive, and, as ill-luck would have it, Cis was just going away from the door when she drove up. So, it seems, he turned back and went in with her."

"Ah!" ejaculates Duke writhing and in the most bitter tone Angie has ever heard him use.

"Could I help it!" she cries passionately. "Am I Fate? Could I conceive such a thing happening and be beforehand with it? Could I have left word with the servants not to let those two into the house together?"

"And what happened?" asks Duke, as much excited as Angie.

Angie shakes her head.

"I don't know. I could not get anything out of him, and I did not like to ask her at the time. Afterwards I had no opportunity. He went off as soon as I arrived, and she was crying in that little end room."

"By God!" cries Duke, and he gets up violently and strides about the room.

"Then," Angie hurries on, determined to get it over, "I went out of the room to let her recover herself, and when I returned and we had drunk tea, Lord Belhaven came in, evidently knowing, though I have not the smallest idea how, that Cis had been here, and carried her off in a towering rage. A week after I heard that the poor girl had been sent to school, and that the Belhavens were accusing me of plotting the whole miserable affair."

And, overwrought by vexation and regret, Angie subsides into a flood of tears.

For the first time in his life Duke blames Angie —for the first time in his life he sees her weep without endeavouring to console her.

"It is a bad business," he says, continuing to stride up and down with knitted brows—"a bad business."

To think of his young queen of whom he has such exalted ideas being sent to a boarding-school,

He has a loathing and horror of those establishments.

Angie is not long drying her tears. She feels angry and bitter too. Duke has taken it even worse than she feared—he blames her—it is cruel and unjust of him.

She stands up and stiffens her back and throws up her head as her way is when her pride is hurt.

"Perhaps," she says in accents of unmistakable indignation, "perhaps you will tell me in what way I am to blame?"

Thus attacked, Duke is somewhat at a loss.

"You always used to be able to manage things," he answers rather vaguely.

"Can I manage chance! can I foresee circumstances any more than you can say positively what may happen to you between now and this time to-morrow? Will you," with growing impatience, "tell me how I could have helped this strange accident? I make much of this girl and court her society, for *your* sake: I speak of you to her; I am doing all in my power to bring you together. Cis Deerbrook is going to be married out of your way. I ask the girl to tea at five o'clock—I am detained till ten minutes past by my dressmaker. In the meantime Fate arranges to bring these two people whom I would have given the world to keep apart to my door-step at the same moment—pray be just—is this my fault? am I responsible?"

Having it put to him in this way Duke is obliged to admit that Angie is not altogether in fault. Still he is disappointed in her—she used not to let things go wrong.

When he parts from her that night, there is not the same look in his eyes that there was when he entered the house a few hours before.

He walks home feeling very wretched. He wants to know more: to-morrow he will hear what the Belhavens have to say. He does not mean to go against Angie nor to let anyone abuse her to him, but he would like to hear the other side. What can that be when her version looks so bad! His little love at school! he feels very bitter against Bel for having taken such a violent, and, he thinks, unnecessary measure.

He is in no mood for sleep to-night. Arrived at his own house, he goes to his room where a bright fire burns and his letters are laid out in a great pile awaiting him. He lights a cigar, and, taking a big chair near the fire, proceeds to glance over his correspondence. It is a trick of his when he opens a letter to crumple up the envelope in his left hand and fling it into the fire or the waste paper basket.

He has got through some dozen or so when he comes upon one that makes his eyes kindle and a sudden new life and energy animate all his frame.

Needless to say what letter it is that stirs this emotion in him.

"Will you please come to me as soon as you can!"

He looks at the beginning and the end, but like the letters of many young people, it is not dated. Then Duke bethinks himself of the envelope. He had made a good shot with that one however—it is only a grey ash, at this moment fluttering up the chimney. But he feels quite sure that this touching little epistle must have been penned from Brighton in her distress at being sent to school in disgrace.

Duke's heart leaps in his breast. Ah! she thought of him when she was in trouble! she flew to him for deliverance when she was oppressed! that showed she was not after all so altogether indifferent to him. And by Heaven! she should find that her trust was not misplaced—he would indeed rescue her from her oppressors—he would see whether the girl he loved should be punished and made wretched whilst he stood by.

Duke felt morally and physically a giant as he made these reflections. After he had read the lines traced by an agitated, uncertain hand some dozen times and allowed his soul to be possessed by joy, one or two practical thoughts began to creep into his brain. In the first place, Brighton is a large town —its schools are legion, and he has no clue to the whereabouts of his love. And in the second—still

graver consideration—when he has found her, what is he going to do with her? He cannot carry her off by the strong hand, and, unless he has some right to a voice in her affairs, say as her affianced husband, how is he going to protect, defend, and rescue her?

He glances impatiently at the clock. It is ten minutes past one. His thoughts fly to Angie—he wants to ask her advice, her opinion; in fact, he wants to know from her what he is to do. Anyhow, now, he must wait till the morning, and to-morrow, to-day rather, he says triumphantly to himself, he will respond to that call—he will see his young love for whom all his sometime slumbering passion is awake and alive again. His heart glows as he thinks of her with mingled worship, tenderness, pity—as much as is possible for his rather prosaic nature, he idealises that beautiful-eyed, large-souled child. If out of gratitude she should really come to love him! the bare thought makes his heart feel almost too big for his body.

Angie is scarcely dressed next morning when she is informed that Mr. Vereker is in the dining-room downstairs, and has come to breakfast.

She hastens down. Algy, always a late riser, is not half through his toilette.

A little to Angie's surprise, Duke's face has resumed its old radiant expression; he greets her

with more than his accustomed heartiness; he seems full of a strange and joyful excitement.

She, who has been a prey to the most melancholy and unpleasant reflections since he left her, is not a little re-assured at seeing him come back to his old form.

Duke does not give her time even to ask a question. He takes Cilla's letter from his breast-pocket, and puts it into her hand.

"There, my dear," he says with a triumphant ring in his voice, "read that."

Angie obeys him, and, as she reads, is stricken with amazement, and having even perused every word twice, whilst Duke eagerly watches her, cannot find aught to remark on the subject. She would have thought Cilla the last girl in the world to take such a step, all the more so because of her infatuation for Cis—a girl who loves one man, it seems to Angie, must look with horror and repugnance upon every other would-be lover.

"Poor child!" she thinks however, pityingly, "she is very young: she has no mother; indeed her mother does not appear to have played much of a mother's part to her when she was alive."

"Well?" cries Duke almost impatiently.

"I wonder when it was written," says Angie, anxious to gain time, "there is no date. Where is the envelope?"

"That's the unlucky part," he says, "I threw it in the fire."

"My dear Duke," remonstrates Angie, "how often have I told you what a bad habit that is of yours!"

"Yes, I know. I'll try to break myself of it. But there's no doubt, I should think, it was written just after she was sent to this infernal school. You don't know where it is, I suppose?"

Angie shakes her head.

"I must find out somehow," he says. "I am going down there to-day."

At this moment the servant comes in with breakfast and this gives Angie a little time for reflection.

What mad idea has Duke got in his head? Then she says to herself that after what has happened, it will not do for her to seem to place any obstacle between him and Cilla lest she should lay herself open to suspicion.

"Of course I shall go to her," says Duke the instant they are alone together.

"And when you get there?" asks Angie.

"I don't know. It must depend on circumstances of course."

He goes to the window and drums on the pane and Angie makes the tea.

After a considerable pause she says gently,

"I don't quite see how you can act without the

Belhavens in the matter. And even then unless she——"

"Yes," says Duke grasping her meaning. "But do you think she would have sent for me if she had not meant—had not thought——?"

The door opens and gives admission to Algy.

"Hullo, Duke!" he says with his heartiest manner, "what has got you up at this hour?"

And as Duke is in no mood for secrets, he tells Algy frankly the reason of his visit.

Algy is a wise man in his generation. He is a good listener and chary of giving advice and he always seems interested in his friends' affairs.

Secretly, in his heart, he is rather disgusted and pronounces Cilla to be "a bad lot."

"At all events I can tell you the Square that the school is in, though I don't know the name of the old woman who keeps it," he says.

"Can you?" cries Duke delighted. "That's near enough. I'll find the house, no fear. Where's Bradshaw, or the A.B.C.?"

"I'll get it," says Algy, entering quite pleasantly into the spirit of the thing, whilst Angie, perplexed, uncomfortable, strongly disapproving and yet afraid to say so, sits almost silent at the table.

"I wish," remarks Duke suddenly, "that you would come too. Then it would be all right and the governess couldn't make any objection to my seeing her."

But Angie thinks she has suffered quite enough in being mixed up with Duke's and Cilla's affairs and is not disposed to bring down any more maledictions and opprobrium on her own head.

"I have two or three things to do to-day that cannot possibly be put off," she answers, "and, indeed, I might do more harm than good. But, Duke," reluctantly, "have you thoroughly considered? are you bent on going? Would it not be well to see Lord or Lady Belhaven first?"

"No," says Duke resolutely. "Whatever happens I mean to go."

And, accordingly, an hour later, he sets joyously off in his new *rôle* of knight-errant and deliverer.

CHAPTER IX.

And all this time how has it fared with Cilla? Has she, as young people often do after their first passionate burst of resentment, settled down, become reconciled to her life, and, with the involuntary optimism of youth, made the best of it?

Not at all! She has taken it much worse even than anyone would have supposed. She is literally breaking her heart in silence and in secret. The lady of the establishment is very much puzzled about her. She had tried at first to draw her out; to cheer her up; to get her to mix with the other pupils, but in vain. Cilla would not stop a moment longer downstairs than she was obliged on account of her lessons or her meals, but fled back again to the solitude of her own chamber. She would not even admit anyone inside her door except Dawson. Mrs. Blank shrewdly guessed that there was an unfortunate love-story in the case; the girls imagined that Cilla was stuck-up and rather mad, and resented her exclusiveness. If it had not been that Dawson was still in Brighton, Mrs. Blank, seeing how pale, wretched, and hollow-eyed the child looked, would

really have been half afraid of the responsibility of keeping her.

It was no doubt very wrong, very naughty of Cilla to behave in this foolish, wilful, passionate way, but then her temperament was peculiar and her life had been a strange one. All her young years had passed unhappily: her heart had been full of strife, bitterness; vain, impossible, ungratified longings after love and happiness. Suddenly she had been transplanted to an entirely new existence: had become a grown-up young lady; a personage of importance and consideration, and virtually her own mistress. She had been sought in marriage by a man of great social importance, and was, as she thought, poor child! the heroine besides of one of the most romantic love-stories in the world. For nothing could have persuaded her that Deerbrook did not love her, and, but that he was the victim of cruel circumstances, would have married her. Now to be thrust back again into a life of thraldom, restrictions; to the bare, meagre life of a school—to have to do lessons in a school-room after living in boudoirs, to sit down to comparatively coarse and ill-served fare after her five months' experience of the elegancies and refinements of life: after walking, riding, driving at her own pleasure, to be cooped up within four walls all day and only permitted to walk out with her maid at a stated time. And, worst woe of all, to be removed from all chance or

possibility of seeing the man of whom her heart was full; of hearing even so much as the mention of his name.

When she and Dawson walked out together, she refused to follow that young woman's suggestion of looking at the shops or seeing the carriages and the promenaders to "cheer her up a bit," but she would invariably go down to the sea or to the end of the pier and stand gazing, gazing and listening to the plash and tumult of the waves that somehow seemed to soothe her poor distraught brain and heart.

Dawson was very curious to know what the cause of her young mistress's grief and banishment was—she shrewdly suspected that it had something to do with the handsome gentleman whom they met in the Park, and who sent the parcel and the flowers. But Cilla, though she had once and again thrown herself on Dawson's sympathising breast and sobbed her heart out there, would not confide to her the nature of her woe, and the maid had therefore no opportunity of proposing to aid her young lady in her love affair, as, being rather of a sentimental turn herself, she would have been ready and willing to do.

What then were Cilla's feelings when, abhorring the school, looking upon it as a place of exile, disgrace, and misery, Mr. Vereker's card was brought to her as she sat practising in the bare schoolroom.

Everyone was out; the mistress, and the young ladies, who were taking their morning walk. The servant, having received no instructions against admitting visitors of either sex to see Miss St. George; knowing that she was treated with the highest consideration, did not even hesitate when a fine gentleman of commanding aspect asked in a very decided voice whether the young lady was in, but ushered him at once to the drawing-room.

A great wave of joy rushed to Cilla's heart—in an instant she remembered her letter and her appeal to Duke and knew why he had come. She thought of him as a dear and welcome friend, as a deliverer; she did not trouble her head about his having wanted to be her lover.

True to the instinct of her sex, instead of rushing straight to meet him, she ran upstairs to smooth her hair; to make sure by a look at her glass that she was fit to appear before him. And then, her heart beating violently, she descended to the drawing-room and turned the handle of the door. There stood Duke, his kind face beaming with smiles, his eyes full of tenderness. He came towards her and took her hand with a glad and friendly clasp that inspired no repugnance in her, nothing, indeed, but pleasure and confidence.

"I got your letter," he says, "and I came off at once. I only returned yesterday and did not open it till one o'clock this morning."

"Have you—have you seen my sister or Lord Belhaven?" asks Cilla in a hesitating voice.

"No," he answers, "I thought I would see you first. Now, what am I to do for you?"

Then Cilla, with great tears pouring down her face like rain, tells him of her sufferings and her misery, and Duke, worked up to the highest state of excitement by her imaginary wrongs, listens. She does not, we may be sure, bring any mention of Deerbrook into her recital.

Looking imploringly at Duke, she says,

"You will go to them, will you not, you will persuade them to take me away, *at once?*"

Duke feels like a man who sees the one great desire of his life within his grasp. And he is quite aware that if he is to seize it, he will have to use the greatest circumspection and caution. He has not forgotten the disastrous results of his too hasty wooings on the previous occasions—he has a tight guard over himself to-day; he does not mean to scare the bird he wants to lure. So he refrains from taking her hands or going near her as he would like to do, but stands leaning against the chimney-piece.

"You may trust me," he says, looking down at his boots because he is rather afraid to meet those great wistful eyes just at this moment, "to say and do everything I can. Belhaven may resent my interference—you know what he is. But, now, if I

had a right to speak; if you would give me a hope that some day you might come to care for me, then it would be different."

Cilla turns cold and trembles a little—the memory of Cis steals across her.

Duke, glancing up, reads the expression of her speaking eyes.

"You need not be afraid," he says hurriedly, "that I would ever wish to force you into anything that was distasteful to you. But now, for your own sake, if you will let me speak to the Belhavens and say that you are promised to me, I will wait a year, two years, if you like, and, after that, I swear to you that, if you find you cannot care for me, I will not hold you to your word."

In his own heart, Duke feels quite sure that by that time his devotion cannot fail to have gained her love. Most men think a woman is to be won by constant service.

Cilla takes a rapid survey of the position. A year; two years is a long time—she never means to marry anyone if she cannot have her only love, but this is a respite. It does not even occur to her that it is acting rather meanly by Duke to avail herself of his help with the deliberate intention of making him no return.

"Do you promise that?" she says with solemn eyes. "If you let them think so now, you will in reality only be my *friend*, and will not want to be

anything more against my will? You will not turn round and join them in persecuting me?"

"You need have no fear of that!" he answers tenderly. "Poor little child! how could anyone persecute *you!* But you see, don't you, that unless I can tell them that I have some right and authority to speak in the matter, it would not be much use my going either to your sister or Belhaven."

"Yes," says Cilla.

"Then," continues Duke, trying to restrain the eagerness of his voice, "you consent to my telling them that you are engaged to me; and you trust yourself implicitly in my hands."

The hunted look comes back for a moment into Cilla's eyes. Then she walks straight up to him where he stands and puts her little hand voluntarily into his.

"Oh!" she says imploringly, looking at him with entreating eyes, "you won't expect anything of me, will you?—you know that I could not love you or anyone *like that* now!"

Duke thinks of Deerbrook and grinds his teeth. But he has made up his mind to bide his time.

"Trust me!" he says very kindly and impressively —"trust me! Now, I will make the best of my way back to town and get everything settled; and, this time to-morrow, you shall be free again—as free as air."

"How good you are!" cries the girl, so brimful

of gratitude that she has lost all sense of repugnance to him.

"Good-bye, my dear," he says, restraining himself from all lover-like words or acts—"good-bye till to-morrow!"

When he is gone, Cilla flies off to her room and indulges the most extravagant burst of joy. She bestows a torrent of kisses on the pug, who hardly appreciates them, whereas the donor of him would have been intensely thankful for only one.

Dawson is petrified, when she comes in the afternoon, to see the change in her young mistress. Cilla laughs and chatters and herself proposes to go and look at the shops, but she will not tell the cause of her jubilance, for fear, after all, lest her joy should be turned into mourning. She is not at all sure of her brother-in-law.

Duke meantime, equally joyful and full of confidence in the beneficial effects of time and devotion, is speeding back, though not very fast, to London. He drives straight to Grosvenor Street and is so fortunate as to find Lady Belhaven at home and alone. He much prefers seeing her to her husband.

She greets him with a pretty little cry of pleasure. It is, indeed, an agreeable surprise to her, for she had feared that, after Cilla's rejection of him, he would have cut the family for good and all. So, when, more cheery than ever, apparently, he comes in and greets her warmly, she is charmed and de-

lighted. He has scarcely uttered the conventional "How d'ye do" when he plunges into the object of his visit.

"I have come to see you about your sister," he says.

"She is away," answers Dorothea. "It is most unfortunate, but it is entirely Mrs. Beauclerc's fault."

She had made up her mind that when she saw Duke, no matter how he took it, she would let him know what a traitress Angie was.

"Oh no, I don't think that," Duke answers.

"But it is," persists Dorothea. "And when I have told you the story, however much you may be devoted to Mrs. Beauclerc, you will see that I am right."

If a man makes a remark that you do not like about your particular friend, it is tolerably easy to stop him, but when the offender is a very pretty woman whom you admire, it is not so easy. But Duke is a very staunch friend.

"I am quite sure," he says with considerable emphasis, "that Mrs. Beauclerc would never willingly do anything to injure my interests."

"But she has," cries Dorothea, "that is if your interests are connected with Cilla, and I will prove it to you."

"I have just come from seeing your sister," interrupts Duke, and this, as he intends it to do, effectually stops Lady Belhaven.

She positively stares at him, her red lips parted by surprise.

"From seeing Cilla? At Brighton?" she asks after a moment's astonished pause.

"Yes, and she is going to marry me: she is engaged to me."

Dorothea wonders whether Duke is in his senses or if she is dreaming.

At this moment Lord Belhaven comes in. He greets Duke warmly: since the Deerbrook affair, his old friendship for him has come back.

"Bel," says his wife, "Mr. Vereker has just told me the most extraordinary thing I ever heard in my life. He has seen Cilla and she has promised to marry him."

At her words, Belhaven gives evidence of the same surprise that Dorothea had experienced a minute earlier. It has the effect of producing temporary dumbness in him.

"How did you know where she was?" he asks rather sternly of Duke as soon as his tongue is loosed.

But Duke has no intention of betraying his young love.

"That is my secret," he says a little awkwardly. "But I hope that as you approved of my speaking to—to Cilla a few months ago, you are still of the same mind. It is all settled—she is to be my wife and I want you to take her away from that hateful place which is breaking her heart, *at once*."

His tone is half imperious.

An almost similar thought strikes husband and wife at the same moment.

"What a cunning creature that girl is!" thinks my lady.

"I never imagined Cilla capable of such duplicity," says my lord to himself.

He turns towards the fire.

"Do you know," he asks, "why we sent her to school?"

"Yes," answers Duke firmly though he colours. "All the same I want you to take her away to-morrow."

Belhaven makes an impatient gesture.

"My dear fellow," he exclaims with latent irritation, "there must be sense and reason in everything. I cannot take her away at a moment's notice."

But Duke answers with strange decision.

"*I could not bear* the thought of my promised wife being at school. *I should hate* anyone to be able ever to say that she had been at one for even three weeks."

Dorothea goes to his rescue.

"I think, Bel dear," she says softly, "that if Mr. Vereker is going to marry Cilla, he has every right to have his wishes attended to."

"The woman will think me mad!" cries Belhaven, alluding to Mrs. Blank.

"It does not matter what *she* thinks," utters Dorothea contemptuously.

"I make a great point of this," says Duke with increased earnestness. "I want you to take her away at once—to-morrow."

And after a little more pressure from the two, Belhaven yields rather ungraciously.

Duke prepares to go.

"Won't you stay and dine?" asks Dorothea coaxingly. "Do!"

"Not to-night, thanks," he answers. "I am going to Mrs. Beauclerc. She will be only too delighted to hear my good news. I assure you, you have quite misjudged her."

"Well then, come to-morrow," urges Dorothea. "Cilla will be here then," and all his face lights up as he answers.

"Thanks. I shall like to awfully."

The moment the door closes upon him, Dorothea says to her husband,

"It is evident he does not mean to give up that horrid woman. I suppose we shall have to pretend to be civil to her and to accept her explanations."

"I shall not," answers Belhaven sternly, "unless she is able to clear herself to my satisfaction."

"Did you ever know anything like Cilla's artfulness?" cries her ladyship. "Ah! you would never believe me when I told you what she was. I should not wonder if this is a *ruse* of hers just to get away from school and she will try to slip out of it later."

"If I thought so," says Belhaven, "I——"

"Leave it to me!" remarks Dorothea. "I will make it pretty difficult for her. I will publish her engagement to everyone."

It is with feelings the reverse of pleasurable that Belhaven takes his way to Brighton the following morning. He feels angry with Cilla; disappointed, deceived in her. Though he knew her to be wayward, passionate, unreasonable, he had never believed her capable of duplicity. Before he sees Mrs. Blank, he thinks it advisable to have an interview with her to learn as much as possible of the real state of the case. His face is very stern and uncompromising as the girl trips joyously into the room with dancing eyes, feeling sure that he has brought her order of release.

"I do not understand any part of this business, Cilla," he says coldly. "It is all very strange and very unsatisfactory."

In a moment the tears spring to her eyes—a harsh tone invariably produces this effect upon her.

Then, without waiting for her to speak, he continues,

"I must know one thing first. Do you intend to marry Vereker? or have you only given this promise just to suit your own ends?"

The girl colours deeply and looks down. She is the soul of truth—she cannot tell a lie.

Then it suddenly occurs to Belhaven that, after all, it will be wiser not to put too many obstacles in

her way. Deerbrook married—her own engagement declared to the world; it will not be very easy for her to get out of it. And Duke *is* a good fellow and she will probably grow to care for him. So, instead of compelling her to answer, he adds severely,

"If you play him false after giving him your word, you will be acting in the basest, most dishonourable manner and I shall wash my hands of you *for ever*."

But Cilla remembers the nature of her compact with Duke though it does not suit her to confide it to her brother-in-law. He has promised that in a year, two years if she does not care for him, he will not keep her to her word.

"Mr. Vereker and I quite understand each other," she answers in a low voice.

"Oh," responds Belhaven shortly, "I am glad to hear it. All I have to say is, don't attempt to make a fool of me a second time. Now you had better go and get ready whilst I see Mrs. Blank."

Two hours later, Cilla with Belhaven and the pug were on their way back to London; Dawson being left to pack and follow by a later train.

Lady Belhaven, meantime, had ordered her sister's room to be prepared and adorned and had arranged the heavy portières between the two drawing-rooms so as to give comparative privacy to the back room which she intended the lovers to occupy. When Cilla arrived, she greeted her with an unusual

demonstration of affection; forbore to ask any questions, and was very sweet and sisterly. It seemed like Paradise regained to Cilla and she felt very grateful indeed to Duke.

After dinner, Dorothea asked her sister to sing; (the piano was in the back drawing-room); checked her husband who was about to draw back the curtains with manly want of tact, and by a gesture of her head indicated to Duke that he was to follow his bethroted.

Cilla sang to him and presently they drew up to the fire and he began to tell her about his travels whilst she listened with interest. Before he left her, he put a diamond ring on her finger, and, when she would have demurred, he said, half laughing, half serious,

"But without that, you know, no one would believe in our engagement."

So she made no further objection. At night, before going to bed, she put it carelessly down on her toilet-table, but she went through the little ceremony of adoration and worship before her heart and forget-me-nots as usual.

From this date Cilla was treated with the greatest consideration and became quite an important personage. Dorothea took her constantly shopping and visiting, made much of her and consulted her. Mrs. Vereker would be a very great lady indeed: Dorothea

wished to be on the best possible terms with her. She often alluded in a playful manner to Cilla's engagement, both when they were alone and in company, and Cilla did not dare to breathe a word that should seem to throw any doubt upon the matter. Lady Belhaven took good care that she and Duke should be seen together in public, and, very soon, all society knew that the rich Mr. Vereker had been caught by a mere chit of a girl and was desperately in love with her into the bargain.

One day Lady Belhaven and her sister were drinking tea with Mrs. Verschoyle. Presently a good-looking, cheery young Guardsman was announced.

"How very festive you look, Jack," said the lady of the house.

"Of course I do," he laughed. "I've just come from the wedding."

"Wedding! What wedding?"

"Why, don't you know? Cis's!"

A sudden chill crept to Cilla's heart. She felt as though she were going to faint or die. But no one remarked her.

"I thought it was to-morrow," remarked Mrs. Verschoyle. "Well, and how did he bear it?"

"Oh! I never saw a fellow so cheery. He was beaming. We had a night of it last night—we thought Cis would want cheering up, but deuce a bit. He was the gayest and the rowdiest of the lot. You'd have thought he was going to marry the ob-

ject of his tenderest affections or the most beautiful creature in the world."

It is a mercy that no one looks at Cilla. The most terrible agony is convulsing her—she feels overcome with shame and misery. All this time she had thought he loved her; that his marriage would be a sort of death-blow to his hopes as it would to hers.

That evening, Duke, as he frequently does, dines in Grosvenor Street. He asks Cilla to sing and she goes to the piano. All dinner time she has been making the most violent effort to be composed; to hide her wretchedness, and, all dinner time, she has been framing a resolve.

She sits down to the piano but a great revulsion of feeling comes over her. No! she cannot sing—she goes and stands by the fire.

"What is it, my darling?" whispers Duke, betrayed for once into forgetfulness by his anxiety. She looks so white and ill.

"Duke," she says in a low voice, and a thrill of rapture goes to his heart, for it is the first time she has ever called him by his name. He goes over to her but something in her face warns him not to approach too near.

"When I said at Brighton that I would marry you," she says, "I did not mean it: but now I have changed my mind. I will."

There is such a dreadful woe-begone look in her eyes as she speaks the words that it is impossible

for him to extract from them the delight that he would fain do. Still he says, with some emotion,

"My own darling!" and makes as if he would draw her to him. But she, shuddering a little, puts up her hands as though to ward him off.

He goes away perplexed yet trying to feel jubilant. It is only an hour later when he hears a man speak of Deerbrook's wedding at the club that he understands. A bitter feeling sweeps across him.

"Time! time!" he says impatiently to himself.

But she, poor little girl! is meanwhile taking the heart and forget-me-nots from *her* heart and putting them away with her dead hopes.

CHAPTER X.

Dorothea had decided that she would appear at the last "Drawing-room" in May. She was to be presented by a Duchess, and was in turn to present Cilla. Her own wilfulness, however, was the cause of a catastrophe which prevented her carrying out this cherished idea. Duke had given her sister a very handsome chestnut horse, and, from the first moment that she saw Cilla on his back, her ladyship was fired by a desire to ride him and show herself to the world *en Amazone*. All the beauties; all the celebrities rode: until she was seen in the Row, the full measure of her charms and graces would not be thoroughly known to society. She possessed a very perfect-fitting habit which, with some little pressure, could be made to meet; for, before her marriage, she had been occasionally lent a horse in the season. If Cilla, who, as her sister contemptuously said, had no figure at all, looked to such advantage on the chestnut, what would her appearance be? Duke, however, had the bad taste to prefer his betrothed's figure to Lady Belhaven's more developed charms. Cilla had small bones; was very fragile and extremely graceful, and the celebrated man who made her habit had

lent her the roundness that he considered necessary. Duke, who thought women ought to be slender, frail, and small (not short), considered Cilla perfection, and never felt more sublimely happy than when she was mounted on the chestnut and he rode at her bridle-rein.

When Lady Belhaven intimated to her lord her desire to ride, he flatly refused his permission. First he stormed; then he entreated and implored. Dorothea was not at all vixenish nor shrewish, but she had wonderful powers of persistence, and generally got her own way with Belhaven because he had no staying power and expended himself in violent feeling and emotions at the outset. And, backed by Flora Verschoyle's counsels, Dorothea was beginning to display an amount of quiet resolution that was the despair of her husband, who had thought her soft and pliable as wax. So, in spite of all he could say, she one day made her *début* amongst the other fair Amazons, and was as much remarked and admired as she had expected. Cilla, who was extremely unselfish, was easily coaxed into lending the chestnut, and rode beside her sister on the horse she had been used to ride with Belhaven. Duke was not very well pleased, but he was so good-natured that it did not occur to him to remonstrate with either sister. All went well for about a fortnight: Dorothea was surrounded by admiring cavaliers, and saw herself pointed out by the people who

walked or leaned over the rails—her vanity was delightfully stirred; she had never been more radiant, nor, indeed, looked more beautiful.

Then, one morning, the chestnut was frightened by a steam roller and bolted from one end of the Row to the other. Dorothea was not thrown and the horse was stopped without accident of any kind, but she suffered a terrible shock to her nerves and the consequences were disastrous.

Belhaven was reduced to despair: his fondest hopes were scattered to the winds, and Dorothea was punished by being kept three weeks to her room and having to give up all idea of the "Drawing-room." Duke begged that Cilla might still be presented by his sister, but the girl, who had an immense organ of veneration and looked upon her Sovereign as next to God, had such an abject terror of intruding her insignificant person upon royalty that she was only too thankful to make her sister's illness an excuse to protest that she would "much rather wait for Thea."

Belhaven, in spite of the severity of his disappointment, forbore to reproach his wife. He devoted himself to her sick-room and was indefatigable in nursing and amusing her, being quite different from most husbands who are generally inspired with a burning desire for flight as soon as their wives fall ill or out of sorts.

By the beginning of June, Dorothea was quite

herself and more eager than ever for gaiety and amusement, although she was entirely deprived of any wish ever to mount a horse again. But she dined out continually; accepted all invitations that were designated "small and early" though she gave out that, at present, she could not go to balls, and she danced with the greatest enjoyment and delight. There had been words between her and her lord about her dancing—it was intolerable to him to see other men's arms round her waist, for, indeed, there was no doubt he suffered intensely from that agonising disorder, jealousy. He had first stormed, then entreated, then told himself as usual that he was playing the tyrant and the fool and going the right way to drive her from him. To save himself pain, he refrained from accompanying her to dances. He was rather given, like the ostrich, to burying his head in the sand, but from a different motive—he did not want to see things that made him uneasy and unhappy.

Dorothea was charmed at his absenting himself and so giving her increased freedom: she and Cilla went together. Cilla was passionately fond of dancing—it was the greatest earthly good she knew; greater even than galloping over turf, (the excitement of hunting was unknown to her), or cutting through the waves in a yacht. Good music, a good floor, a good partner and it was nothing less than rapture. Duke, who did not dance round dances

himself, used to watch her with the greatest delight —he was not cursed with Belhaven's complaint, jealousy—rather, when he saw another man's arm round her, he said to himself with increased satisfaction that she was his own. Certainly she never gave him any cause for Othello-like feelings; never betrayed more pleasure in the society of any other man than she did in his—the value of her partner to her was his perfection in the poetry of motion. She herself was the most graceful dancer imaginable, and, when she danced, there was almost an inspired look in her large, mournful eyes. Women can never forgive a member of their own sex who is not distinctly a beauty for carrying off a great matrimonial prize. They said she was strange-looking and nothing but a child, and were quite angry with men sometimes for hinting that her extreme delicacy, her fragileness, her want of materiality were the very attributes most calculated to fascinate a great big fellow like Duke who was not likely to perform the supernatural feat known as "setting the Thames on fire." Since that dreadful night when Cilla had given up hope; torn the false symbol from her bleeding heart and resigned herself to the idea of becoming Duke's wife, she has got over the worst part of her sufferings and become reconciled to her fate. And, indeed, it is a fate that to most people would seem the most delightful and desirable one imaginable.

Deerbrook is now merely a memory: the misery, passion, and rapture of her love for him have faded into haze. It is only now and then when some tender or touching melody strikes her soul through her ear that she is overcome by a sudden wild agony of yearning, but it passes away again as it came. Fortunately she is not likely to meet him. He and his bride have gone with a party to Canada and The States,—but she fancies that even if she met him face to face now, she, knowing his heartlessness, would not suffer any painful emotion. For Duke she feels a perfect friendliness. He no longer inspires any repugnance in her even when he presumes to put his lips to her cheek or the small ear that she turns to his caresses. The fact is that Duke is terribly afraid of this slight young creature, and does not dare betray any evidence of passion in her presence whatever he may feel. A little more boldness would have been very beneficial to his interests: Cilla deplored to herself his apparent inability to inspire feeling in her, but Duke was very much like a child with a soap-bubble, almost afraid to breathe lest it should burst.

Cilla is greater friends than ever with Mrs. Beauclerc, to Duke's intense satisfaction, and the world sings pæans of praise to Angie's wonderful cleverness.

Dorothea, who had plenty of tact, saw that it would be much better to be friendly with Angie,

and Belhaven allowed himself to be convinced that she had not been to blame for the meeting of Deerbrook and Cilla.

Angie, being thoroughly kind-hearted and not selfish, took great pleasure in playing chaperon to Duke and his young love. And, with the best grace in the world, and in spite of all Cilla could say, she insisted on always giving up the place of honour to the girl. She knew how natural it was that Duke, even though he protested, should like to have his beloved beside him, and they treated her with such immense affection and consideration that there was no fear of her being made to feel small or slighted.

When Lady Belhaven was of the party, she must of course always be the chief personage and the first consideration, so for all reasons, Duke preferred Angie's third to her ladyship's.

There was one person, however, who was anything but pleased at the state of affairs and that was Captain Beauclerc. Cilla did not like him, and, no matter how much he might lay himself out to flatter and be delightful to her, he advanced no further in her good graces. The more she loved Angie, the more she resented his selfishness, inconsiderateness, and covertly slighting treatment of her, and with the out-spokenness of a young girl, she told Duke exactly what she thought about him, and even brought Duke, who had grown so used to him that he observed nothing, to her way of thinking.

Thus, it not unfrequently happened that parties were made in which Captain Beauclerc was by some accident not included, and, if Cilla disliked him, he grew to hate her cordially though he treated her with the most pronounced respect. But, to Angie, he abused her in no measured terms and often expressed a wish, indeed, prophesied, that a time would come when he would be "even with her."

The season was drawing to its close. Cilla, so far from being unhappy, since she had always had an intense craving for the gaiety and pleasure which were freely offered to her now, felt that she only wanted one thing to make her supremely happy. That was love. To her ardent imagination, her passionately yearning heart, life without love was like a sailing ship without a breeze. However brightly the sun may shine, it is no help to one when one is becalmed.

It was settled that she with Lord and Lady Belhaven and one or two congenial spirits were to spend the Cowes week on Duke's yacht. Cilla enjoyed her week amazingly, but Dorothea, who liked that part of it well enough which she spent on terra firma, displaying her lovely white and pearl-grey toilettes and receiving much adulation, took a hearty dislike to yachting from the disagreeable sensations which it caused her. There had been some talk of their going for a cruise with Duke and

visiting Spain and Egypt, but her ladyship came to the conclusion that there was nothing in the world she should hate so much, and cried off after Cowes. So then a fresh arrangement was made which met with the approbation of all parties, except, perhaps, of Dorothea, who had a rooted distrust of Mrs. Beauclerc, and of Captain Beauclerc, who disliked Cilla more than ever.

Duke was to go to his moor in August with the Beauclercs and a couple of men friends, and Lord Belhaven was to go to his. Towards the middle of September, when Angie had seen her boy safely and comfortably settled at Eton, she, with her husband, Duke, Cilla, and one or two men to be selected later, were to start on their three months' cruise. To this Cilla looked eagerly forward and Duke more eagerly still. How ardently he wished, poor fellow! that she would marry him without further delay and go off with him unchaperoned to southern climes and perpetual sunshine; but when, one day, he ventured to hint at his desire, she met him with such a vehement "No!" such an indignant reminder of his promise, that he retired humbly into his shell and presumed not to say another word on the subject.

The old friendly, affectionate relations had been resumed between Belhaven and his sister-in-law, both of whom were very much of the same impetuous and forgiving disposition. They had been angry

with and bitter against each other, but all ill-feeling was buried now—indeed both would probably have denied that it ever existed.

Cilla felt intensely for Belhaven. She saw that he was unhappy and that Dorothea, so far from studying him, seemed rather to take a pleasure in thwarting him. If she ventured upon a remonstrance, her sister smiled (not laughed) her to scorn, and said that Bel would have to get accustomed to her and to his own position.

One day when Belhaven and Cilla were alone, he said suddenly,

"What a good fellow Duke is! I hope to God, Cilla, you won't behave badly to him and make him wretched with the cursed coquetry that you women seem to delight in!"

She coloured a little, but did not answer, and he went on passionately,

"You women never seem to have any love to give to the men whose devotion is worth having; who would lay down their lives for you; but if some cursed selfish blackguard comes along who would not care whether he broke your hearts or not, you put on all your smiles for him and would let him trample on you if it amused him."

Cilla does not reply even though she reads the allegory; but her love has faded into immateriality, and she scarcely clothes it with Deerbrook's bodily presentment now.

"It is a bitter, bad world," says Belhaven, who is in one of his most pessimist moods (her ladyship is visible in the distance flirting with Colonel Lynn, who is their guest up in Scotland): "I don't believe there is any worse hell than this."

"Oh, Granville, don't talk like that!" cries Cilla shocked, but laying her hand kindly upon his arm.

She had never been taught more than the mechanical part of religion; the outward formulas and observances, for neither mother nor sister had a particle of real religion, and only observed the Sabbath from motives of decency and decorum. But Cilla is devout and religious, and has a profound veneration for everything good and pious as a nature like hers is tolerably sure to have. True, she is perplexed sometimes, grievously perplexed to reconcile omnipotence and universal benevolence, but to her faithful young mind doubt is sacrilege; the most awful of crimes. Belhaven, who is dreadfully tormented and harassed by doubts, unable to accept old dogmas, yet finding no comfort from new ones, has always been extremely careful to keep his views to himself or only to discuss them with those who are equally perplexed and dissatisfied as himself. He thinks it worse than wrong to infuse doubt into believing hearts; to try to rob anyone, especially a young person, of a faith which satisfies him. He has always gone to church with Cilla and behaved with devoutness there, and it has never entered her

brain that he holds any but the most orthodox opinions. So now, when she intreats him with a shocked, grieved voice not to talk in this way, he subsides into silence.

It is three weeks since Cilla has seen Duke, and, though he is chafing and fretting at the separation, she is taking it with perfect calmness. That is just the dreadful part of it to her, when she reflects on the subject. To have a devoted lover and yet not to care much whether he is present or absent, to be a little pleased when he comes but scarcely at all sorry when he goes. To her ardent ideas of love and lovers this is wrong altogether — the calm, tranquil feeling she entertains for Duke is a sort of death in life. She feels it would be almost better to hate and fear him; to think of him with loathing than to have no sensation at all about him.

September comes—the party are all met—the yacht has started on her cruise. It is a magnificent, starlit night; there is a delicious breeze. Cilla is leaning against the yacht's side. Duke has left her for a moment to speak to the captain. Suddenly, as she stands alone there, a wild yearning sweeps across her; a mad desire to have one she loves beside her; to steal her hand in his; to share with him the rapture of this lovely scene and night. She feels, indeed, how poor a thing it is to be only beloved when one can give no answering love.

A voice beside her says,

"You won't catch cold, my darling?"

It is so horribly prosaic in the midst of her wild, vague aspirations that the revulsion of feeling it causes makes her burst into a sudden passion of tears—tears of bitterest disappointment. Duke is distressed beyond measure—a dreadful suspicion crosses his mind that she is thinking of Deerbrook: it chills his efforts to soothe her; makes him afraid to touch her; to utter anything but the most common-place words.

This is unfortunate. Perchance if he had caught her to his heart and given vent to some of the passion that was devouring him, it might have raised him in her estimation: as it was, he only left her colder, more disappointed still.

But how in the name of Fortune was he to suspect this when his least demonstrations had been so sharply curbed before! It is really wonderful that men get on with women as well as they do considering what changeable, shifting, uncertain moods the sex is subject to.

After the outbreak of this first evening, however, things went very smoothly. Cilla being quite a novice was delighted with everything she saw, and her imagination was so feasted that her heart and its wants remained in abeyance for a little while. Spain with its palaces, cathedrals, its wonderful architecture, its richness of colouring delighted her; she would have thought it a sort of Paradise if it

had not been that she and Angie were often heart-broken at seeing the cruel treatment of animals there. But when she wandered beside Duke in the lovely gardens full of roses and jasmine, oleanders, palm-trees, and maiden-hair ferns, where the purple grapes hung in great festoons and the water glanced and sparkled in marble fountains, and the statues gleamed through flowering shrubs, a sense of happiness and contentment stole over her and he was so kind she forgot to deplore that she did not love him more. And she was delighted with the constant companionship of Angie whose society afforded her more pleasure than that of her affianced husband.

They were away three months altogether, for nothing would have induced Angie to be absent from home when her boy's holidays began. Cilla returned to Red Meade full of delight and enthusiasm at her travels and the joys of yachting; quite reconciled to the idea of marrying Duke; (though not at present); vastly improved in beauty and womanliness as Dorothea confessed, and altogether, she might have been pronounced a very happy and fortunate young woman. It was therefore time for Fate to interfere.

CHAPTER XI.

THE relations between Lord and Lady Belhaven had not improved during Cilla's absence. It is true that Dorothea had a placid temper and detested quarrelling, but there was one thing she detested even more and that was dulness. She had married Belhaven that she might more thoroughly enjoy the world and social pleasures, and she had no intention of being deprived of privileges which she had bought with her beauty and her liberty.

There were constant bickerings between the pair because my lord wanted to live a quiet domestic life whilst my lady was bored to death unless she had other pleasures and amusements besides those which her own fire-side afforded her. When Belhaven said, either passionately or tenderly, according to his mood, that she was enough for him, that he did not want to be perpetually calling in other people to entertain him, she answered, heartlessly enough, that it was very unfortunate their tastes were not the same, and that she really could not be amused by his society alone. When he taxed her with having married him for interest and not for love, she did not contradict him and he had to

endure the cruel pain to a loving heart of feeling and knowing that his love was not responded to.

He could no longer frighten her into good behaviour—she knew his nature too well by this time to stand in much awe of him. He could not play the part of a tyrant, because, although he grew angry and threatened, his wrath *would* melt away and his uneasy conscience *would* accuse him of cruelty, and because he could never bear to see anyone suffering or unhappy. When Dorothea lamented her fate or yawned and declared herself bored to death, he was so acutely pained at feeling his own insufficiency to make her happiness, that he invariably gave in in despair and consented to any plan she had made for amusing herself and which he had begun by opposing. If he could only have grown disgusted with her selfishness, and, from disgust, taken the further stage to indifference; have left her alone and gone his own way! But as long as love lasts, indifference is impossible. He was torn in two by alternate passions of hate and love. He grew irritable and was often provoked into speaking sharply to her in the presence of others. So he was not unfrequently dubbed a surly fellow whilst my lady was pitied, for she never showed temper in public. A very different verdict was pronounced on the pair in the servants' hall from that which society gave. Every member of the household was unanimous in declaring that my lord's little finger was

worth her ladyship's whole body; that if he had a bit of a temper, his heart was in the right place, and he'd do a kind action for anybody, whereas my lady was nothing but a lump of selfishness, vanity and affectation who wouldn't go a step out of her way to save anyone from starving.

Belhaven had one disappointment that was more bitter, more rankling, harder to bear than the rest. He knew that he had made a wrong choice in Dorothea; that he had allowed himself to be led captive by his senses and that she was just the type of woman of whom, theoretically and practically, he most disapproved. He had committed an irretrievable error and he must abide by it; indeed he even now so idolised his wife, that, had he been offered freedom from her, it is more than doubtful whether he would have accepted it. The one thing which he looked forward to, to compensate him for his disappointment, was children. They should be his: he would devote his life to them; to making good, honest, true men and women of them—Dorothea should go her own way and lead her own butterfly life so long as she did nothing to compromise his honour and theirs, and he would be father and mother both to these darlings of his heart. But, since Dorothea by her wilful imprudence had wrecked this cherished hope, there had been no prospect of the desire of his heart being realised, and whilst he was in despair, her ladyship did not

attempt to conceal her own thankfulness and satisfaction.

Every month that passed showed Dorothea more bent on having her own way; on living the life she pleased; and every month saw Belhaven more disappointed, more bitter yet more unable to exercise authority and control over his beautiful wife.

There were words too between them about her ladyship's extravagance. Belhaven was far from mean, but he hated wanton waste of money and indeed thought it a sin when so many of his poorer brethren were in absolute want and wretchedness. His own people were well cared for, but were there not millions of others?

Dorothea had an allowance of pin-money that was more than liberal even for a woman of fashion, but she dressed so extravagantly that she considerably exceeded it. At the beginning of the winter season she had ordered herself a fur coat price two hundred and fifty guineas. She was already in debt and quite aware that she could not pay for it, so she took the bill to Belhaven and with a kiss and an affectionate caress which she thought an ample equivalent, asked him to pay it. To her mortification, he stoutly declined in a manner that left no doubt of his seriousness.

Not only did he decline, but he thought proper to read her a very serious lecture on the wrongfulness of such extravagance, and warned her that he

would not be responsible for debts that she contracted.

Dorothea coloured with anger and drew her arm away from him.

"Very well," she said, "if you won't pay my bills, I daresay I can find some one who will."

They were only idle words spoken on the spur of mortified vanity and by which she meant nothing. But Belhaven turned white to the very lips.

"By God!" he said in a tone of such passion that she was cowed, "if I thought you would take the value of a sixpence from any man——!"

And then he rushed away from the room frightened at the violence of his feelings.

During Cilla's yachting excursion, there had been visitors at Red Meade and Lord and Lady Belhaven had paid two or three visits to friends. Dorothea very much preferred visiting to receiving —the latter involved so much trouble and was not very successful, for her husband, though hospitable, was not exactly a cheery host, and the people whom she liked to have about her were quite uncongenial to him.

The second week in January, the Belhavens and Cilla were invited to stay at a house some thirty miles' distant, renowned for its hospitality and the cheeriness of its parties. Duke was to be there and the Beauclercs with their son, as there was a boy of

his age in the family. Dorothea was looking forward keenly to this visit. Lord Grandston was to be amongst the guests and he had paid her marked attention at Cowes.

The Marquis of Grandston was a very handsome lad, not yet of age, whom every pretty and fashionable woman delighted to pet and spoil and to be noticed by. His father had died when he was seven years old; he would be fabulously rich; his good looks were remarkable; his manners taking, and he had been so befooled and beflattered that it was really astounding that he should not be more selfish, conceited, and arrogant than he was. He had already been the hero of two notorious liaisons, and women of fashion were rather proud than otherwise of having their names coupled with his. Dorothea was extremely eager to make the conquest of him, although with her husband present, it would not be a very easy matter. For Grandston was not accustomed to be treated distantly or with reserve, and had no occasion to take trouble about one pretty woman when fifty others were waiting anxiously for his smiles.

When the time appointed for the visit drew near, Belhaven was seized with a violent influenza cold and neuralgia, and it was quite clear that he would not be able to make one of the party. He was really very unwell indeed, and one might have thought that Dorothea would at least offer to remain

at home to nurse him. She did not, however, give the least hint of such an intention, being far too much afraid of being taken at her word, as her heart was set upon this visit.

Cilla begged to be allowed to remain with him —she was a devoted nurse and never more in her element than when trying to alleviate sorrow and sickness—but Belhaven would not hear of it, and Dorothea said tartly that it was absurd, and that she could not go to the Castle alone. Belhaven was not selfish and would not have allowed his wife to make the sacrifice of staying at home with him, but he felt bitterly pained that she should not even have hinted at it, and passed a sorry time with his own reflections during her absence. To be neglected by those whom you love when you are ill and suffering is a very severe sting to a sensitive mind—it generally happens to those people who are themselves most devoted and affectionate in tending others, and is apt to awaken very sad and bitter reflections in their breasts. It is, however, quite an unusual case for the man to be the sufferer and the woman the neglectful nurse.

The day arrived and Dorothea and Cilla set out on their journey. My lady, lovely and smiling, bade a cheerful adieu to her depressed and melancholy lord, and Cilla, sympathetic and reluctant to leave him, gave Belhaven a thousand injunctions to send for her at once if he felt dull or grew worse, and

promised to write him reams of letters telling him all that happened.

Arrived at the Castle, they found a cheery party assembled. Lord Grandston devoted himself at once to Lady Belhaven, and her satisfaction at his attentions was so great that it enhanced her beauty and lent more than usual charm and grace to her manner. When Cilla joined her sister before dinner, she thought she had never in her life seen so beautiful a creature. As they entered the drawing-room together (Dorothea always made a point of being late, and liked to make a sensation by her entrance) every eye was turned admiringly or enviously upon the pair. For Cilla, though far less beautiful than her sister, was even more striking and calculated to excite interest. Duke in his faithful heart thought her "out and away" beyond Lady Belhaven in every respect.

Cilla was dressed entirely in white, white of costly simplicity, but in deference to a whim of Duke's which she was not altogether reluctant to gratify, though it was rather against fashion and custom, she wore jewels of great value on her neck, arms and fingers. They were all pearls or diamonds —she never wore a coloured stone of any kind. Round her neck were three rows of pearls with a magnificent clasp of diamonds which Dorothea sorely envied her. She wore bracelets to match, and diamond rings on her slender fingers. There was

no ornament in her dark hair, which was gathered close to her beautifully-shaped little head, and reposed in a knot just in the *nuque*—no earrings in her delicate ears. But indeed other jewels than those which nature had placed in her head would have seemed out of place. Her skin was of the whiteness of marble; not flesh-tinted like Dorothea's —by the side of her sister she gave the idea of spirituality contrasted with fleshly charms—eight men out of ten might have preferred the latter, but the two would probably be more intensely attracted than the other eight.

Some of the women sneered at the bad taste of a young girl wearing jewels only fit for a married woman, and hinted that she was no doubt as strange as she was strange-looking, but those who were partial like Angie, or impartial like one or two pretty women present, could not fail to yield her a considerable meed of admiration, though, as a matter of fact, not one of her own sex thought her comparable in point of actual beauty to her lovely sister.

A calm contentment with her lot had come to Cilla—she was able to contemplate marrying Duke (though not just yet) with perfect equanimity—she could even acknowledge to herself that the friendly feeling of affection she had for him was more satisfactory than those terrible heart-wearing emotions which Cis had inspired in her: feelings so intense

that they made every moment spent out of his presence intolerable, and every moment with him one of either rapture or anguish. Yes, she supposed that everyone had that traditional first love which rarely came to fruition, and afterwards settled down into a tranquil affection for another that proved more satisfactory in the long run. She believed herself cured of her love for Cis—if she were to see him to-day, to-morrow, she did not think the sight of him nor the sound of his voice could make her heart beat one pulsation the faster.

Poor deluded little girl!

The first evening at the Castle wore away delightfully—there was a small dance as a finish, and Cilla would have been thoroughly happy but for a latent uneasiness caused by Dorothea's behaviour with Lord Grandston. She danced only with him, and when they were not dancing, they sat apart in some retired nook, and Grandston made open and undisguised love to his beautiful companion. Cilla blushed to her heart for shame of her sister; for shame that other people should be witnesses of her conduct—she did not know whether to be thankful that Belhaven was not there, or to long for his presence to be a check on Dorothea. Every now and then she glanced furtively and uneasily at Lady Belhaven, but she was too proud and too reserved to hint, even to Duke, what she thought and feared.

It was a long time ere she fell asleep that night, debating miserably in her own mind whether she ought to speak to Dorothea, and speculating what would happen during the rest of their visit if her sister continued to be so indiscreet. Indiscreet! nay, wicked! in Cilla's eyes it was a crime for a married woman to behave with such license. She had seen Dorothea encourage the attentions of men before, and her thoughts flew back to Cis Deerbrook's visit to Red Meade and to later occasions, but never, never in such a manner as to-night. Cilla's righteous indignation embraced Lord Grandston as well. When, just as they were retiring, he had asked to be presented to her and had evinced the most decided inclination to make himself agreeable, she had treated him with a frigid *hauteur* that almost surprised herself when she came to think of it afterwards.

The next day passed; all the party were in the highest spirits; the weather was lovely; everything for their entertainment was happily thought of. Lady Belhaven and Lord Grandston were inseparable and Cilla did not know whether to be more shocked or relieved that no one seemed to think anything about Dorothea's behaviour. One or two other pretty young married women had paired off with other than their lawful proprietors, and some of the lawful proprietors also permitted themselves distractions. Cilla who had a very innocent and virtuous

mind and very strong ideas on the subject of right and duty, felt quite indignant at this freedom of behaviour and apparent ignoring of ties; she would have repudiated with horror the idea that she could ever listen to a word of love from a married man, or, if she were married, from any other man than her husband. But which of us poor blind mortals, stumbling on in the dark, sees the pitfall that lies nearest his feet!

It was the second morning after the arrival of the party at the Castle. Nearly all the guests were assembled at breakfast except Lady Belhaven, who made a point of being late, and her sister who was compelled to wait for her. Duke had seated himself beside Angie, and the chair on his other hand was considerately left vacant for Cilla.

"We shall be rather a large party to-night," announced the hostess to the company generally, "so we shall be able to have a regular dance. All the Blank Hall party are coming over to dine—there are twelve of them. I have just had a letter from Gerty and she tells me that Cis Deerbrook and his bride are with them. I am curious to see how that match turns out."

Duke was suddenly conscious of an odd sensation in his throat which seemed to prevent his continuing his breakfast. He bent his head over his plate and appeared more assiduously engaged with

it than before. Angie looked perfectly unconscious, but her husband glanced across the table and scanned Duke's face somewhat inquisitively. The look, however, was lost upon Duke. Some minutes had elapsed—the conversation had fallen into other channels and was loud and general when Duke turned to Angie and said in a low voice,

"What is to be done? I would rather have given a thousand pounds than this should happen."

"Lady Farehome of course knows nothing of what has happened," answered Angie in the same key. "And I do not suppose anyone else here does."

"No power on earth would induce me to meet him," uttered Duke with suppressed anger, "and I cannot bear the thought of her seeing him. He is such a blackguard——"

"Hush!" whispers Angie as the door opens and Lady Belhaven and her sister come in. "As soon as anyone leaves the table, I will make my escape into the gallery; you come to me there, and we will talk it over."

Then Duke proceeds to greet Cilla and to attend with lover-like assiduity to her wants, whilst Lord Grandston performs the same kind offices for her ladyship.

Presently two of the more adventurous ladies of the party who are to accompany some of the sports-

men on the break go to don their coats and Angie follows them out of the room.

"Will you excuse me, darling?" whispers Duke a minute later. "I want to ask Mrs. Beauclerc something."

And Cilla smiles a cheerful assent, little dreaming what the subject of discussion is to be.

CHAPTER XII.

DUKE, hurrying to the gallery, finds Angie awaiting him there. All the inward perturbation that he feels is expressed in his face as he approaches her. He breaks at once into the subject of his fears.

"I dread the thought of her seeing him. Can't it be prevented? Do think of something—what you advise is always right. Don't you think I might ask her, might beg of her for my sake, as a proof that she cares for me, not to meet him—not to go down to-night—to pretend to be ill or something?"

Angie does not answer him for a moment, but he sees by her face that his suggestion finds no favour with her.

"It is always dangerous," she says presently, "for a man to show a woman that he lacks confidence in himself and that he fears another man."

"But," cries Duke with unusual excitement, "if the sight of him were to upset her and undo all the past few months! If I were to lose her now, by Heaven! Angie, I think I should go mad."

"My dear boy," says Angie, falling, as she always does, into the old mode of address when she

sees him perturbed or vexed, "why should you lose her! I candidly think she has forgotten her former feelings for Cis. And I think more than that. I think she is so high-minded and right principled that she would not allow herself to harbour a thought of him now that he is married."

"Oh!" groans Duke, "it is not a question of allowing oneself. If one is in love with anyone, obstacles only make one worse."

"Not with women, I think," answers Angie softly. "Not always, at least."

"Well, what do you recommend?" asks Duke eagerly. "Shall I speak to her? shall I beg her not to talk to or dance with him?"

"No," says Angie decisively. "If I were you, I would not breathe a word to her. Let things take their chance. But, if you are resolved not to meet him, what are you going to do?"

"I shall go over and dine with Jack Tristram. He begged me to go; and I can put it to Lady Farehome that now he has a broken leg it will be an act of charity, and as I am not a dancing man I shan't be missed, particularly as the party is to be a large one to-night."

"I think it is just as well you should be out of the way," observes Angie, "but, Duke," (with great earnestness), "if you should happen to come across Cis, pray don't let there be anything disagreeable

between you. Remember it would excite people's curiosity and set them talking."

"I will do my best *not* to come across him!" says Duke resolutely. "Now I must run and get my shooting things on. Perhaps," coming back a step, "perhaps you will give Cilla a hint, will you?" and Angie answers him by a little acquiescent movement of her head.

"God bless you! What should I do without you?" cries Duke, and, moved by a sudden impulse, he takes her hand, kisses it and hurries off.

When Angie enters the drawing-room, she catches sight of Cilla standing alone at the furthest window and goes at once to join her. Cilla greets her with an affectionate smile. She is fonder than ever of Angie; indeed she loves her better than any other woman in the world.

"Did Duke tell you that he is dining out to-night?" Mrs. Beauclerc asks presently and Cilla turns with a look of surprise and answers,

"No. Where is he going?"

"He is to dine with Mr. Tristram who has broken his leg and wants cheering up a little."

"I wonder he did not tell me," remarks Cilla, but without any sign of vexation or displeasure.

"There is a large party coming over from Blank Hall to dine and dance," proceeds Angie. And then, looking away over the terrace and the green

slopes to the Park, she says as naturally and indifferently as she can,

"Mr. and Mrs. Deerbrook will be amongst them."

Cilla's heart gives a great throb which surprises and disconcerts her. She had not thought the sound of that name could move her now after all these months, now that she is Duke's promised wife, and content, nay, happy in her fate.

She makes no reply—indeed her lips refuse to utter any, and Angie changes the subject. She has given Cilla the key-note. She is warned at all events and cannot be overtaken by any embarrassing surprise.

All day long Cilla is nervous and perplexed. She is vexed at being so and repeats over and over again to herself that the sight of Cis will not produce any effect upon her at all; that she has quite conquered the feelings she once entertained for him and that these anxious sensations are only the fruit of her excitable imagination. And is he not married? That is sufficient to make any thought of him seem a positive crime to Cilla—a crime from which her pure soul recoils as from a temptation to theft or murder. Once or twice it crosses her mind that she will plead headache and remain in her own room all the evening, but concludes that it will be wiser and braver to meet him and by that means to convince herself of her indifference to him.

As usual that evening Lady Belhaven is almost the last to enter the drawing-room before dinner.

A very large party is assembled. The Blank Hall guests have arrived. The first sound which greets Cilla's ear as she enters is Mrs. Deerbrook's strident laugh. Her heart beats tumultuously. She keeps her eyes down-cast and sinks into the nearest chair. She does not want to see Cis and yet she feels his presence in every nerve and vein.

A young fellow who is staying in the house and who has been deputed to take her in to dinner comes and bends over her.

"We shall have a grand time to-night," he says gleefully. "I have been counting and there are at least twelve couple of dancing people. And you *will* dance with me, won't you, three or four times because Duke is away and nobody dances like you?"

Cilla smiles vaguely at him, but her teeth are chattering in her head. She has caught Cis's voice close by her. But she will not look in his direction and makes a violent effort to control herself.

"By Jove!" says her partner a moment later, as she puts her hand on his arm, "how you are trembling! Are you ill or are you only cold?"

"Only cold," answers Cilla hurriedly.

"And we are away from the fire. What a bore!" he says as they enter the dining-room. "It's an awful shame that they always put us young ones on

the cold side. They never seem to think we have any feelings or want any consideration."

They are seated. Cilla is trying to talk and not to think. Suddenly she raises her eyes and meets those of Cis Deerbrook fixed on her with an indefinable expression of surprise and interest. Fate has ordained that he shall be placed exactly opposite to her and that they shall be just in front of an opening between the floral decorations of the table.

He makes her a little grave melancholy inclination, and she returns it by a faint gesture, whilst a deep blush turns the marble of her skin to roses.

The look of surprise on Mr. Deerbrook's face was genuine. Was this beautiful young woman with the costly jewels round her white throat and arms the little schoolgirl whom he last saw in passionate grief in Angie's drawing-room? He could not keep his eyes off her. In vain his neighbour tried to distract his attention—even his dinner engrossed but little of his thoughts to-night. She was so unlike anyone else—there was some extraordinary fascination about her—he had never seen eyes like hers—his one present object was to win them to his. And she belonged to another man—she was to be the wife of the rich Duke Vereker—she would be a very great lady indeed. Had she forgotten him? How interminable the dinner seemed, and he was longing for it to be over that he might speak to her.

It was not that he was harbouring any designs against Duke's peace of mind or hers—it was only that he was in the habit of doing what the fancy of the moment prompted, without the smallest reference to or thought of the feelings of anyone else. Simply an intensified sort of selfishness, which women had always done their best to foster—nothing more.

Cilla, who was like an electric spark, felt the magnetism of his eyes stealing over her more powerfully at every moment. She made superhuman efforts not to look at him; not to think of him. She talked with forced eagerness to her companion; seemed to listen with the deepest interest to all he told her, and yet, she hardly even heard a word that he said. She could hear her own heart beat—every nerve was throbbing painfully. She could not eat a morsel, her feet were like marble, an unwonted carmine crept into her cheeks enhancing her beauty tenfold. She was suffering a martyrdom because she was fighting violently against herself—her nerves were in a state of tension amounting to agony. And then, suddenly, it seemed as though her power of resistance gave way—she looked up and met those irresistible eyes. After that she ceased to struggle: it might be dangerous, mad, wicked even. She let her eyes dwell on his, ignorant, careless of what they said. He could read them and a thrill of passionate satisfaction shot through his heart. When would dinner be over that he might get to her! As

they were placed, no one else could see how absorbed they were in each other, the ferns and flowers prevented their neighbours on either hand from intercepting their glances.

When the ladies retired from dinner, Cilla fled away to her room. And, once there, a sort of horror at what she had been doing crept over her and she saw the terrible pitfall that lay before her. She tried to think of Duke and of her duty to him, but already the recollection of him was intolerable to her and she shrank from the thought of him as she had done in the old days. Oh why, why had she not remained upstairs safe out of harm's way and forborne to run the risk of meeting Cis—of having her life spoiled and ruined by him! If she were wise, nay, if she had any sense of duty, she would keep away from him now. If he came and spoke to her, and she knew that he would; would not his low, harmonious voice exert the old charm and power over her? was there not the most terrible danger to her peace of mind? would she not be committing a sin against Duke, against Deerbrook's wife, against herself? But her good angel was powerless under the dire influence which made her feel that, let what would come of it, let her whole future be sacrificed; be under the same roof with him and remain out of range of his voice, out of sight of his face which was more to her than any other in the world, she neither could nor would.

She turned hurriedly to go for fear conscience should yet stop her. As she passed the long glass, she cast a look at herself; then paused and took a longer survey. A little smile came to her lips; a smile of triumph—she had been wont to have a very poor opinion of her charms; but for once, she knew that she looked beautiful.

When she entered the drawing-room there was a vacant chair by Angie. She always sat near Angie, if possible, but to-night she was only anxious to avoid her and seated herself on a low couch beside her sister. Dorothea was far too much engaged with her own affairs to think of Cilla. A former flame of Grandston's had come over with the Blank House party and had been placed next him at dinner. They had whispered together to Lady Belhaven's unutterable disgust and chagrin. She was determined *coûte que coûte* that her rival should not triumph over her; they would see to-night which could boast Grandston's allegiance. Under these circumstances it is not to be supposed that she had one thought to give Cilla.

When the men joined them, Deerbrook made straight for the sisters, but Dorothea gave him neither word nor look. She was bent on catching Grandston's eye and when she succeeded, beckoned him towards her with a pretty gesture which he obeyed with alacrity.

Cis was content; there was no hesitation in his

mind to-night as to which of the sisters most attracted him: for once Dorothea's charms paled before Cilla's. For the present he only spoke of common-place topics, but his voice and eyes had an eloquence out of all proportion to his themes.

Angie, glancing in his direction, was smitten by a strange misgiving. After all, she thought, Duke's idea of keeping her out of sight of him was wiser. "But they must have met some time," she argued to herself with a sigh.

The sound of music came from the distance—some of the party had already repaired to the ball-room.

"You will dance the first waltz with me," Deerbrook whispered, and Cilla bent her head in answer. Was it not for him she had reserved it when her companion at dinner had so entreated her! She had always heard that dancing was one of Cis's chief accomplishments.

As they entered the room, the musicians began to play one of the loveliest, dreamiest of waltzes, and, in a moment, his arm was round her and they were floating away to fairyland. Never, in imagination nor dream, had such rapture filled Cilla's heart—dancing had always been a passion with her; but she had never before felt any approach to the sensation of ecstacy that it gave her to-night. Past and future were alike forgotten—she neither knew nor recked what strange eyes might read in her face,

what strange tongues might say of her; she was perfectly, divinely happy—she cared for nothing else.

And when they paused, he bent down and said in his low, caressing tones,

"I never knew what dancing was until to-night. You must not dance with anyone else," he added a moment later, utterly careless in his selfish heart of compromising her. When had he ever been careful of a woman's reputation unless danger threatened himself equally? And there was no danger here—to him. Duke was absent; his wife never interfered with him—it was part of their bargain. She used to laugh and say it was in the marriage settlement.

"I have promised Captain Blount the next," Cilla answered, but she looked up at Cis as though she were ready to break her promise if he bade her. He was about to bid her, but bethought himself that sometimes these little altercations, when a lady excused herself from a promise, were disagreeable in a ball-room, so he said,

"Dance that one with him, but do not promise him or anyone else another. *I* shall not dance except with you," and he laid an almost reproachful stress on the I.

Cilla was strangely *distraite* as she fulfilled her engagement with Captain Blount—to his great disappointment she paused frequently, and was with

difficulty persuaded to re-commence. He was a good dancer: last night she had taken pleasure in waltzing with him, but to-night his very touch seemed to jar upon her nerves: he was positively antipathetic to her.

He was puzzled and vexed—until these last few minutes she had been so cheery and pleasant to him: he had liked and admired her amazingly, and been very much inclined to envy Duke. He fancied he must somehow have offended her, and racked his brain to think how. At last he ventured to put the question, but she looked at him with a little air of cold surprise that silenced him at once. The fact was that her whole heart and thoughts were so full of Deerbrook, she felt impatient with and aggrieved against anyone who kept her from him.

Most of the men present came and invited her to dance but she refused, giving vague and unsatisfactory excuses. Lord Grandston asked her and she declined, and he went away quite offended—he was not accustomed to being refused. One or two of the party thought she was perhaps put out by Duke's absence. But those who were not too much engrossed with their own affairs to remark her closely, and to take an interest in her movements, when they saw her waltzing for the second time with Deerbrook, were seized by a new idea.

Angie felt terribly uneasy as the pair passed her twice, unconscious of her presence or apparently

of that of any other human being save their own and each other's. Cilla's tell-tale face frightened her. She could only be devoutly thankful that Duke was not there, but she had a painful sense of impending catastrophe.

Cis knew the house well, and, when the second waltz was over, made his way, with Cilla on his arm, along a corridor to a room occasionally used as a mórning-room. They found it tenantless, but a fire burned in the grate and one pink-shaded lamp partly lighted it. It was a handsome room with a good many paintings on the walls; low, comfortable lounges and chairs disposed about, and a couple of high, old-fashioned gold-stamped leather screens.

Cilla, who had never been in this room, fancied Deerbrook was taking her to the billiard-room which was in the same part of the house.

"I have never been here before," she said, feeling a little shy and uneasy as she discovered that they were alone. For some reason she did not want him to think that she had connived at a *solitude à deux*.

"Ah," he replied with a low, contented laugh, "I know my way about this house very well. I was here a month once."

But he did not think fit to give her any further details about his former visit.

"Come and sit here," he said, drawing her to-

wards a couch near the fire with its back to one of the screens.

And when she had obeyed him, he seated himself beside her.

Until this moment, he had not reverted to the past nor said anything which, repeated to Duke in words merely and without the tone in which they were uttered, could have given him any serious umbrage or uneasiness.

But now, suddenly, he took her hand and said with concentrated passion,

"I wish I had not come to-night. I never dreamed before how much I had lost!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A GREAT tremor creeps over Cilla's heart. She is bewildered, frightened, spell-bound, and yet, withal, she feels a sense of entrancing joy to know he loves her. In a moment of time, a hundred thoughts flash across her brain. She feels that the great crisis of her life has come; that, after it, everything will be havoc and shipwreck, but, for the time, it is such joy and rapture as to be cheaply purchased by almost any after pangs. The wrong, the terror, the shame of hearing these unlawful vows gives, for the time, almost an intenser zest to her sensations, and yet, she feels as though she were not a free agent but had been brought suddenly to the edge of an abyss without any volition of her own.

Her eyes are downcast. She is trembling like a leaf; and he, noting it, presses her hand and speaks in the tenderest, most caressing accents.

"My little darling," he whispers, "do not tremble so! do not be frightened!"

And as the poor child hears these sweet words, her heart seems to say to her conscience: "Let me be happy only this once! Only this once: after to-

night, my life will be over and finished." But Deerbrook's conscience, if he ever had one, is dead and silent long ago: it never occurs to him for a moment to think that, being another woman's husband, he is committing a wrong in uttering love-words to Cilla, who, on her side, is bound and tied, if not actually, still by the unwritten laws of right and honour. He has always done just what the passion or caprice of the moment prompted. He is not of those who can keep silence for a woman's sake, and, indeed, those who can and do, rarely get much credit for their forbearance from the object of it.

"Darling," he utters in his most beguiling voice, "what do you think my life must be, tied to a woman with whom I have not a sentiment in common; whose every word disgusts me! And when I think that I might have had you!"

Then the memory which has haunted Cilla so often returns to her; the memory of the words that made her pluck his image from her heart along with the diamonds and forget-me-nots, his gift; that made her pledge herself to Duke the miserable night after she heard them. And, suddenly, she lifts her intense eyes to his and keeps them there unflinchingly while she speaks.

"And yet," she says, "I heard that the day you were married and the night before, you were as gay and happy as though you had been going to marry the woman you loved best in the world."

"Who told you that!" cries Deerbrook eagerly. "It was a lie, or, if I seemed so, it was only to hide what I really felt. Some one told you that for his own purpose. Duke, I suppose," with bitter stress on the name.

"No, it was not," Cilla answers. If she is unfaithful to Duke, she will not be unfair to him. "It was some one who did not even know that I knew you, and it was not told to me."

"Did you never hear," he utters reproachfully, "of people laughing and feigning to be in boisterous spirits because they were so intolerably wretched that otherwise they would break down?"

Cilla has heard of such cases, and Deerbrook's voice and eyes persuade her in a moment that his was such an one, and that she had judged him unjustly.

"But you," he proceeds—"you who I fancied cared a little about me; you got over it soon enough. It is months since I heard you were going to marry Duke."

"You were married. What was there for me but to try and forget you?" answers Cilla in a mournful voice, yet as if wishing to defend herself from a merited accusation.

"I was compelled to marry," says Deerbrook. "I could not stave off my creditors any longer. I must have done either that or leave the country. But now," looking at her pale young beauty which

seems so fascinating to him to-night, "if I could undo it, I would sacrifice everything; take any consequence for your sake. It drives me mad to think that you will belong to another man."

The fervour with which he speaks is not feigned —at this moment it is intolerable to him to think of anyone else stepping between him and what he covets.

His words bring back to Cilla the thought of that other man whom she is so grievously wronging —a chill strikes her heart—she shudders.

"I shall never marry," she says, taking a sudden resolve—"never!" And she looks steadfastly into Deerbrook's eyes.

For a moment he returns the look—then he draws her towards him and presses a long kiss to her lips. She does not resist—it is the last moment of her life, she feels: shall she not have one instant of Heaven to pay for all the coming wretchedness!

A strident laugh makes them start apart. Cilla, like an arrow from a bow puts a dozen feet between Deerbrook and herself, and stands looking like some terrified young wild thing. For an instant both had thought the laugh was inside the room, but another second sets their fears at rest. It came from the corridor outside. The voice is that of Mrs. Deerbrook.

Cis has time to rise to his feet and stand looking

perfectly calm and innocent, before the door is pushed open and his wife puts her head in.

"You here!" she says, and then she and the man who is her companion enter together. "I did not come to look after you," she goes on, laughing. "I had no idea you were here. We were only exploring. Well, good-bye, we won't spoil sport!"

And, with that, she goes out again, and her loud voice is heard retreating down the passage.

Deerbrook would like to take up the thread of the romance where he left it, and moves towards Cilla, but she waves him off with a frightened gesture. She has been rudely awakened from her dream, nay, now it seems like an awful nightmare.

Something in her face makes him pause and she turns towards the door in a listening attitude. Mrs. Deerbrook's voice has died away. Then, suddenly, before he can guess her intention, Cilla has fled and he is left standing there alone.

Like one pursued by furies she flies to her room and locks the door behind her. She throws herself down on the hearthrug and looks with wild, staring eyes into the fire, as if she saw there some horrid sight. And indeed she does; for she is looking inwards at her own heart with the glamour of the last three hours torn from her eyes. She is seeing her own conduct by the light of her regained conscience, and, in her own eyes, she is a miserable, guilty creature, an outcast, a shameful polluted

being. She who judged others so severely; who was so shocked at Dorothea's freedom with Lord Grandston; who had considered the flirtation of a married woman almost a crime, is herself at the very first little breath of temptation fallen, disgraced for ever. On her lips are the kisses of another woman's husband—in her ears his love words are ringing: she feels his touch yet on her hands. Her only sensation is one of abject shame and horror. What will become of her?—what will she do?

She rises to her knees and prays with passionate fervour to Heaven for pardon—the tears run in streams from her eyes; but thoughts of Deerbrook steal in and seem to make her prayers a sacrilege. She feels as though she had no right to pray—as though Heaven must reject her prayers as a mockery. She hides her face despairingly in her hands. Then thoughts of the future come creeping coldly, threateningly to her heart. She had said she would never marry and she had meant it. But now she feels as if she would rather die a hundred deaths than Duke should know what she has done—Duke or any other living being. She does not fear that Deerbrook will betray her; she has that boundless confidence in him which every woman feels for the time in the man she loves. But if she were to tell Duke on the morrow, as she had intended, that she can never marry him: that he must give her back her freedom as he once promised; he would guess

that Cis was the cause. He and the world and Belhaven and her sister would know her guilt and that she had done this for love's sake of a man who was married. And then eternal shame and disgrace would overwhelm and cling to her! She must, for the present, play a part; must let everything go on as it has done recently and then, later, when she is back at Red Meade, she must find some excuse to break with Duke. Having once been so false to him, she can never be his wife without confessing her treason, and that confession no power on earth shall ever wring from her. But she will be wife to no living man now—her heart can never be touched by any other than Cis, and of him it is sin and shame to think. She unclasps the pearls and diamonds from her throat and looks with loathing at them: she plucks the brilliants from her fingers and says with contempt and misery to herself that she has sold herself; that her friends have sold her for these. She would like to flee away to a convent; to any haven of rest out of the world's way and the way of heart-burnings, miserable vanities and petty ambitions. To flee where she could atone for her sin which every moment makes more hateful and terrible in her eyes.

Her maid comes to the door, but she sends her away and lays herself dressed on the bed. Towards morning she sleeps for an hour, but when she wakes, the events of the past night come back to

her like some horrid nightmare and fresh terrors possess her soul.

Had she been missed from the ball-room? was it known that she went away to that distant room with Deerbrook and never returned? would Duke hear anything of it? Cilla's heart beats with wild fear. She can do anything, bear anything rather than anyone should know what has happened—she will smile at Duke; will try to seem bright and gay for fear suspicion should be awakened in his breast. She is a poor hand at counterfeiting, but for once she will try her powers.

She little guesses, poor child, what an awful Nemesis is dogging her steps, nor who has, for the time being, constituted himself her judge and executioner. She little dreams that there was a witness of the scene between her and Deerbrook, and that the witness was the only enemy she has in the world.

Captain Beauclerc, having been rather put out by the coldness of a lady whom he admired and who evidently preferred the society of a Guardsman present to his, had retired from the ball-room and proposed to himself to spend half an hour in a comfortable nap—he was not very keen about dancing at any time. He had made his way to the room where Deerbrook conducted Cilla, being also under the impression that it was the safest place from intrusion. And, throwing himself on a sofa in a

dark corner behind the colossal screen he had fallen into a comfortable doze when he was awakened by the sound of voices. He was about to make his presence known by a cough or a movement when Cilla's agitated tones fell on his ear and then Deerbrook's passionate response.

"Oho, my lady!" said Algy to himself, "so now I have caught you!"

Under ordinary circumstances, no one would have professed himself more indignant at the meanness of eavesdropping than Algy; he would have said that it was an action no gentleman would commit. But now he told himself that it was his positive duty in the interests of Duke, who was such a good fellow, to listen and detect the guilt of these conspirators, so with bated breath and keen ear he set himself to play the spy. Not a word was lost upon him; though he did not see the kiss, silence at such a moment was eloquent enough for him to conjecture it—then came the laugh which startled him as well as the guilty pair, for it would have been very unpleasant to be caught in his position; then Mrs. Deerbrook's words and after that a rustling sound; a man's hasty footsteps and a suppressed cry. Then silence, dead silence.

A few minutes elapsed and Algy peeped cautiously round the screen to be sure no one was there. The room was empty.

"The little viper!" he said to himself vin-

dictively. "I always thought she was as bad as she could be. But I'll be even with her now. Duke shall know what she is, and, after that, I shall be very much surprised if she is ever mistress of the Court. Duke would stand a good deal, but not that, by Jove, not that, I think!"

Then he stood leaning with his back against the mantel-shelf thinking how he could tell Duke and how best come out himself of the very questionable *rôle* of listener.

He had always hated Cilla; she had come between him and Duke and robbed him of many a pleasant expedition. Duke had not been the same to him since his engagement. Now, perhaps, it would be Miss St. George's turn to be left out in the cold. And Angie! he would take precious good care not to let her know a word until he had told Duke. She was such a fool she would probably take the girl's part and try to smooth it over. But the story he meant to tell was one that would take an uncommon deal of smoothing over.

He returned to the ball-room in the highest spirits, quite consoled for the neglect and desertion of his fair friend. Cis was leaning moodily against the wall; Cilla was nowhere to be seen. A little later his wife beckoned to him.

"Have you seen Cilla?" she whispered anxiously, and he answered with an innocent air,

"No. Is she not dancing?"

It was quite true that he had not seen her.

The hours passed away and still Cilla did not re-appear, and Angie felt rather relieved at her absence. It looked as if she had come to a sense of her danger and fled from it. Lady Belhaven seemed quite bent on throwing her cap over the mill: her rival was thoroughly discomfited and overthrown. Dorothea did not even miss her sister from the ball-room.

Once or twice Angie thought of going to Cilla, but decided that it was wiser to leave her alone. If she was suffering she would rather be without a witness, however friendly and sympathising, to her pangs. They were unlawful and dared not therefore be confessed.

Captain Beauclerc knew that Duke was to stay the night with his friend and return the following morning in time for breakfast; he therefore resolved to unfold his tale before Duke had a chance of seeing anyone else. He bade his servant let him know the moment Mr. Vereker returned and, when he heard that Duke was in, went straight to his room.

"Hullo, you're up betimes!" cried Duke in his cheery, ringing tones at sight of his unexpected visitor. "Well! how did the dance go off?"

"Oh, all right," replied Algy. Then he went over and sat on the edge of the bed and looked very grave.

"What's up?" said Duke, asking the question that he was intended to ask.

"The deuce is up," returned Algy laconically.

"Grandston and Lady Belhaven?" inquired Duke, thinking it must be something that in some way concerned him and his belongings. He had successfully banished his fears about Cilla, saying loyally in his heart that she was too good and pure to think anything of Cis now he had a wife.

"My dear old chap!" said Algy with a profound sigh—"it's something that cuts you a good deal nearer than that."

Duke turned ashen pale. He had no doubt of what was coming—and his strong frame trembled.

"For God's sake speak, man!" he said. "What do you mean?"

"Upon my soul, I don't know how to tell you," uttered Algy.

"Say it! say it!" cried Duke with unusual passion. "For God's sake have it out and let me know what you're driving at!"

"Cis has been up to his old tricks again."

"Well!" cried Duke hoarsely. "What then? Has she gone off with him? What have you got to tell me?"

"No, no," returned Algy soothingly—"she hasn't gone off with him—not likely. He knows a trick worth two of that. But for your own sake you ought to know what has been going on between

them, though I'm sure," fervently, "I'd rather cut my tongue out than be the one to tell you."

"Go on," said Duke. And he grasped the back of a chair and held on to it like a man who is taken with sudden dizziness.

So Captain Beauclerc told his tale. It was neither plain nor unvarnished—he made the very worst he could of it, and that worst was bad hearing enough, heaven knows, for a lover who, up to this time, had put almost an idolatrous faith in his mistress's honour and purity of heart.

Duke was like one stunned. He had not dreamed of a blow like this: it had never entered his mind that the pure, cold, young girl who would scarcely allow him to touch her lips could be a passionate woman under the influence of another man.

For Captain Beauclerc expatiated upon the embrace he imagined, as though he had positively been an eye-witness of it, and Duke was too crushed and stricken to think of cross-questioning him as to how much he had seen. It was worse than he had ever feared or dreamed. She was under the spell of this hound, this traitor, whose blood he would have if he lived. Once in his presence, no tie, no affection, no sense of duty or right or principle could restrain her.

Duke groaned.

"My God!" he said, covering his face with his hand. "This is more than I can bear!"

"Cheer up, man!" cried Algy with spirit. "There are more women in the world than one."

But his remark fell flat upon his hearer's ears. There might be more women in the world for other men—there was only one for him, and, from henceforth, she was not for him.

"Does Angie know?" he asked, forgetting in his anguish the ceremony that he always observed in speaking of her to her husband.

"No," said Algy. "I thought it best not to tell her."

He did not say why.

CHAPTER XIV.

It was with a feeling of considerable trepidation that Cilla knocked at Lady Belhaven's door in the morning to ask if she were ready to go down to breakfast. But she soon saw that she had nothing to fear in this quarter—her ladyship had been far too much occupied with her own affairs the previous evening even to notice her sister's absence from the ball-room, and, this morning, she was bent on making herself lovely to the exclusion of every other thought. Relieved of one anxiety, there was another desperate one in front of Cilla—the meeting with Duke. Would he have heard anything? not of what had taken place in that distant room—that was of course impossible, but some one might have told him that she had danced twice with Deerbrook and had disappeared afterwards.

It was an immense relief to her that Duke was not one of the party at breakfast. She supposed he had not returned. Two or three men inquired what had become of her the night before, and she answered that she had not felt well and had gone to bed. She looked so white and hollow-eyed this

morning that her excuse seemed plausible enough, and only drew forth expressions of regret and concern.

Cilla could not eat a morsel. She was filled with painful sensations of terror and nervousness—she longed for the meeting with Duke to be over. It was the first time she had ever felt afraid of him: she meant to do violence to her feelings and to meet him with more than her usual display of kindness.

As she went out from breakfast, Captain Beauclerc came up behind her and whispered in a low voice,

"Do you mind coming with me? Duke wants to see you."

Then a deadly sickness seized her; a terror such as she had never known in her life before—never was guilt more plainly stamped on a human countenance than on that which was turned suddenly upon Captain Beauclerc. Even he felt just a little bit sorry for her. Her lips unclosed to ask what Duke wanted, but no sound came from them, and, trembling in every limb, her teeth chattering in her head, she followed the gaoler who was taking her before what she had no doubt was to be the inquisition. It added doubly to the terrors of her imagination when she found that she was being conducted down the self-same corridor, to the self-same room where her treachery to Duke had been committed.

After all it was not such a very strange coincidence. In the largest houses there are not an unlimited number of rooms in use where guests can expect to enjoy perfect privacy. But, in spite of her fears, Cilla tried to say to herself that Duke could not possibly know what had happened; could not know more than that she had danced with and talked to Deerbrook. When, however, Captain Beauclerc opened the door for her and retired, closing it behind him, and she caught sight of Duke striding up and down, she recognised in his face evidence of a deeper knowledge than that of which she suspected him. And she became aware of something else too—namely, that the room was twice as large as it had seemed the night before, and that it had been cut in half by the great leather screens which this morning were pushed aside.

Duke, stopping short in his walk and looking full at Cilla as she entered, read in the terrified expression of her face the full confession of her guilt. He even thought that Algy had made the best rather than the worst of the story. A burning indignation filled his heart. He had always been wont to feel so tender, so protective to this pale, fragile maiden, and now, every gentle thought of her gave place to a sort of furious desire to punish her—for the first time in his life he felt cruel. Heaven knows it was only because he loved her so dearly.

The eyes that had never looked at her except with loving tenderness were full of wrath now. He was no lover to-day but a stern judge, and Cilla shrank and cowered before him and drooped her eyes under the fire of his. And these evidences of fear and guilt lash him into still deeper anger.

He stops dead short. He does not offer to take her hand nor touch her nor give her any morning greeting, but delivers his sentence at once in a harsh, dry voice.

"After what happened last night," he says, "you will not be surprised that I relinquish all claim to you. No doubt it is what you wish yourself—what you have been waiting the opportunity to say to me; but, under the circumstances, I think it is for me to speak and to say that all is at an end between us and that I shall never trouble you any more."

He speaks with intense bitterness, for the sight of her, the thought that he is losing what he loves so idolatrously, goads him beyond endurance. There is another thought which drives him to frenzy. It is that he who would have given half he possessed for one voluntary kiss from her sweet lips should never have had any but the coldest response to his passion, whilst here, in this room, another man has held her unresisting to his heart, has heard the confession that has never been vouchsafed to him although it was his right. And he, if he had suffered from her coldness, had not complained of it

but had said to himself that it sprung from maiden modesty and purity and so had respected it. But now he knew differently—it was neither purity nor modesty but only distaste for him. More than all other things he had believed her honest and true and all the time she was false: false as——

Cilla stands before him trembling like a leaf.

"*What* has happened?" she falters.

"What has happened?" he repeats with growing anger. "You do not know perhaps? Well then I will tell you. Here in this room, last night, you allowed the husband of another woman to make the most ardent love to you; you promised him never to marry, and—and—" (Duke literally stammers with passion), "you were in his arms, you who have been so cold with me; who would never if you could help it let me touch your lips, and I was fool enough to think it was because you were so innocent and pure."

Cilla stands like some wild thing caught in a trap. It seems to partake almost of the horror of the supernatural that he should know all this. Was he in the house, in the room? Had a snare been laid for her at which Deerbrook had connived?

She sees before her nothing but an abyss of shame and ruin. Her disgrace will be made public: her own people will cast her off; she will be a thing of scorn in the world's eyes. She has only one thought: to propitiate her judge.

"Oh," she utters in a paroxysm of sobs, "have mercy upon me! Do not disgrace me! do not tell Belhaven! I will do anything—anything in the world you wish. Command anything of me—only do not disgrace me—do not let people know!"

A wild thought of taking her at her word rushes through Duke's brain as she speaks—of exacting a promise from her to marry him at once, in a month's time; for, after all, there is but one wish, one desire in his heart and that is that she shall be his. His tenderness has turned to cruelty, but his passion has not perished with her treachery.

But the thought is no sooner formed than banished. He turns away from the sight of her distress and her tears and forces himself to speak coldly. But he cannot control his bitterness.

"Why should I have any pity for you?" he says. "What do I owe you but wretchedness? You have only made a cat's-paw of me all along, and I daresay laughed behind my back at me for the dupe and fool I was." Then, suddenly, turning towards her, he says with deepest emotion,

"God in Heaven! What is there left for a man when he finds the woman he has believed in from the bottom of his soul to be a creature like you!"

Cilla only answers by sighs and sobs. Most women would have defended themselves; would have protested that so small a sin could hardly merit such terrible condemnation and punishment;

but Cilla believed herself guilty of a crime, and her heart and conscience endorsed every word of Duke's bitter verdict. And because she forbore to defend herself, his conviction of her guilt deepened with every moment, and he hardly knew where to put a limit on his suspicions. All this time, perhaps, she had been corresponding with Deerbrook; seeing him even—perhaps he (Duke) had never known how grave were the reasons that had impelled Belhaven to banish her from home.

A feeling of helpless agony creeps over Cilla. Had she ever thought that she could plead to this adoring lover and find him like adamant? She approaches a few steps nearer to him and clasps her hands in abject entreaty.

"Have pity on me! Have pity on me! Do not disgrace me! Not here, at all events, I beseech you."

Her voice has risen to a wail. At this moment, the door opens softly and Angie comes in.

She had seen her husband whisper to Cilla; had caught a glimpse of the girl's terrified face, and. after hesitating for a moment, she turned and walked slowly after them. As Captain Beauclerc returned along the corridor she met him. He would very much have preferred to avoid her, but that was impossible.

"What is the matter?" she asked anxiously.

"Matter enough," he answered gruffly. "Duke

has found her out at last and I am devilish glad of it."

"What has he found out?" and Angie looked searchingly at him.

"Why, that she has been letting Cis make love to her and kiss her," returned Captain Beauclerc defiantly. "Don't you think that's enough?"

"But how did he find out?" said Angie, deeply troubled and perplexed.

"You had better ask him," answered Algy shortly. "Well! I can't lose all my morning, so now you are here, you can stop and play chaperon."

And with that he brushed past her and hurried off.

She stood for a moment in thought, then gently approached the door of the room where that terrible interview was taking place.

She heard Duke's passionate tones and then Cilla's piteous prayer, and, making up her mind in an instant, she turned the handle and went in. She had all a woman of the world's horror of an esclandre —she must at all events try to save them from that.

Both turned to her at once—they saw by her face that she was in the secret. If Cilla had been her daughter or sister she could not have stood by her more staunchly. But she wanted to have Duke to herself; she wanted to get Cilla away to her room where prying eyes could not see the evidences of her passionate emotion. At all hazards a scene in this house must be avoided; for

the sake of everyone concerned the affair must be hushed up as long as they remained in the Castle.

"Duke," she whispered, "stay here till I come back." And then she drew Cilla's trembling hand through her arm, saying, "Come with me now—we must not give the people in the house anything to talk about."

She took her up a back staircase to her room, saying,

"Lock yourself in. Do not let anyone come in until I return. I will do my best for you."

Then she went back to Duke. She was quite aware that if anyone came in and found her closeted with him it would look very odd, but she must run the risk of that for once. Nearly an hour elapsed before she returned to Cilla. But she had fought her battle bravely and well and had conquered. Her influence over Duke, as we know, was immense.

She had made him give up his intention of seeking out Cis and having his revenge. She had induced him to make an excuse and leave the Castle that very morning. She had, after long entreaty, prevailed upon him to spare Cilla and to refrain from betraying her miserable secret. She had urged eloquently upon him the cruelty of blasting the whole life of a mere child who was suffering bitterly enough for the imprudence of a moment.

And so, after a passionate resistance, Duke yielded, and, two hours later, went out of the Castle

wretched, heart-broken, hopeless. And he had come into it a few days before as happy as a man could be, and would not have changed places with any other on the face of the earth.

But if Angie had stood so staunchly by Cilla, she felt deeply angered against her in her heart, for she loved Duke, and his suffering hurt her as though it were her own. She felt that there could be no tiding over of this disastrous business—their separation was irrevocable now. If Deerbrook had such a terrible influence over the unhappy child, there could be no safety in even marrying her to another man. She was disappointed in Cilla because she had believed her proud and pure. She had relied on her natural high principle to keep her from pitfalls that might cause weaker natures to stumble.

Her face was very grave as Cilla opened the door to her with anxious eyes.

She sat down in the chair opposite to Cilla's and said,

"I have persuaded Duke to keep everything secret for the present. Nothing will be known here. You will not see him again—he will be gone in a couple of hours."

Then, after a moment's pause, whilst her eyes filled with tears, she said, in a voice burning with righteous indignation,

"You have thrown away the truest, kindest heart that ever beat. I am indeed disappointed in you.

I thought you far too right-minded to have listened to another man's love-making when you were bound in honour to Duke—more than all to a man who was married himself."

Then Cilla fell on her knees and hid her face in Angie's lap, and sobbed out her confession and her bitter repentance, and Angie listened, and, because her heart was tender, pitied the girl deeply. She saw that the very worst had been made of the case and she formed a shrewd guess as to how and by whom Cilla had been betrayed. But she preferred to leave the girl's conviction undisturbed that Duke had returned the night before and himself been witness of the scene between her and Deerbrook.

After a time Angie insisted on the necessity of Cilla going into the drawing-room and behaving as though nothing had happened. So, at noon, when Duke was gone, she took her work and joined the party of ladies downstairs. They were all assembled —it was a drizzling morning and there was no temptation to go out. Laughter and merriment were rife; most of the pretty fingers were toying with work and every tongue was sharpened and whetted for scandal and repartee.

Cilla's quiet entrance excited no notice: she seated herself at a table near the general group and affected to be busily engaged with her work. Angie had joined the party some time before. Half an hour passed; the ball of conversation was kept up merrily;

absent friends had a full if not a flattering share of attention. Suddenly something was said that brought the colour rushing to Cilla's face and made her bend more intently over her work.

"I never saw anyone so altered as poor Cis Matrimony has not agreed with him at all. He used to be the cheeriest creature in the world, and, last night, he had not a word to say."

The fair speaker was the lady whom he had taken in to dinner.

"I don't think," she went on, "that he even danced: he stood mooning about looking utterly bored and wretched—so unlike Cis."

"I am sure I am not surprised," uttered another voice. "It is enough to make any man wretched to be tied to such an insufferable vulgarian as his wife. All the money in the world could not make her tolerable."

"Oh, do you know," broke in a pretty girl who was leaning against the chimney-piece, "I rather like her. She is awfully good-natured and tremendously amusing. I was staying in the same house with them last month and they seemed to get on like anything. She used to make us scream with laughter about him—she calls him her investment. She does not mince the matter a bit, but says quite calmly that she got him because she was the highest bidder and that she is perfectly satisfied with her purchase. She told us a most amusing story of how a little

while before they were married some girl, I don't know who, tried to get him away from her and went on her knees to Cis and offered him every farthing she had in the world if he would marry her instead. But, poor little thing, (Mrs. Deerbrook said it quite good-naturedly), it was only a paltry five hundred a year or something of that sort, so Cis didn't avail himself of her generosity."

Angie, happening to look over at Cilla, is positively frightened at the expression of the girl's face. It has turned ashen grey and her hands have fallen in a sort of paralysis into her lap. Then Angie understands. Fearful lest anyone else should remark her emotion, she goes softly over to her and asks her in a meaning voice to show her the new stitch. With a start Cilla recovers herself.

Poor child! Vengeance has indeed taken hold of her. If she had only heard that little story this time yesterday, would she have sacrificed all her future for the sake of a man so false and heartless that he could make a jest of her love and betray her weakness! No doubt the events of last night would form the subject of another laughable story for Mrs. Deerbrook to amuse her friends with.

If the earth would only open and swallow her and her shame! if she could drown herself or run away and hide her face from every human being who knew her!

But now it was more than ever incumbent on

her to smile and deceive the world lest it should guess, not only that all was over between her and Duke, but that Deerbrook was the cause. And so, whilst her poor heart was torn with agony, she smiled at everyone who spoke to her, danced with every man who bade her, and kept her paroxysms of despair for the dead of night when alone she was safe from curious eyes.

Dorothea had expressed surprise at Duke's sudden departure, but had easily been satisfied with the assurance that he had been called away on sudden and urgent business.

The week but one following he was to give a large shooting-party at the Court and they were to be his guests.

Angie stood Cilla's friend bravely and settled and arranged everything for her. She was going straight to town from the Castle and proposed to take the girl with her for a few days, and, in the meantime, Duke was to go over to Red Meade and tell the Belhavens that all was at an end between him and Cilla. He was not to betray her. The name even of Deerbrook was not to be mentioned. To make Duke's task easier, Angie had written him in one of her letters,

"Something has happened that has quite opened poor Cilla's eyes as to the worth of the man who until now exercised such an unhappy influence over her. I do not believe that anything would induce

her to speak to or look at him again if she could possibly avoid it."

Angie herself asked Lady Belhaven's consent to Cilla's accompanying her to London, and as it did not in any way interfere with her ladyship's convenience, but rather suited it, she was quite agreeable to the arrangement.

But on Sunday, the day after her return, she was thrown into a state of extreme excitement and annoyance by a visit from Duke. She received him alone, for Belhaven was still confined to his bed.

"Why, Duke!" she said as he entered the room; "what is the matter with you? How dreadfully ill you look!"

"Do I?" he answered. "I am all right. There is nothing the matter with me."

"Now please don't be ill!" said her ladyship playfully. "I am already bored to death here and have nothing to look forward to but your party next week."

Duke was silent for a moment. Then he said suddenly,

"I do not suppose you will come under the altered circumstances."

"What altered circumstances?" and the pink died away from Dorothea's pretty face.

"That is what I have come about. All is over between your sister and me."

"I do not understand you. What do you mean?" cried Dorothea frightened and almost angry.

Duke repeated his words.

"That is nonsense," said her ladyship sharply. "You cannot throw her over after all this time. It is impossible. We shall not allow it."

"Do you suppose," asked Duke, looking steadily at her, "that it is my doing?"

"It must be," cried Dorothea impetuously. "She has grown quite fond of you: she has said over and over again that she is quite willing to marry you. It must be you, or," with a sudden inspiration, "it is Angie Beauclerc's doing. I always knew she would move Heaven and earth to get you away from Cilla."

Duke made an impatient gesture.

"If you knew," he said, "you would know what a true friend Mrs. Beauclerc has been to—to your sister. But it is no use talking. God knows whether I loved her and whether my life is blasted now. It is her doing. If she likes to tell you, she will: you will not hear anything from me."

Dorothea falls into despair. There is no hesitation in his tone—what he says is solemn earnest.

She thinks of the pearl necklace and the other jewels which she has brought home with her by Cilla's request.

"I suppose," she says, "you would like to have your presents back."

"I never want to see them again," he cries passionately.

"But you must have them," she urges—"they are so valuable."

"Then do you keep them!" he rejoins. "If you send them back, I shall put them behind the fire."

"Well," says Dorothea with an attempt to smile, "I will take care of them until you make it up again. It is sure to come right some day."

And when Duke is gone, before she goes to tell Belhaven the news, her ladyship takes the necklace she has so often coveted and the other ornaments (Duke's gifts) from her sister's dressing-case, and, having first tried them on, transfers them to her own.

CHAPTER XV.

Two months passed—two months during which each of the three principal occupants of Red Meade had his own heart-burnings, his own discontent and unhappiness to bear. And it would not be untrue perhaps to add that each had some portion of the others' sufferings to endure, for when people are discontented and unhappy, they rarely have the power, even if they possess the will, to prevent it affecting their temper and manner to others.

Lady Belhaven was terribly annoyed at the rupture between her sister and Duke, because it interfered with her amusement, deprived her of pleasant society and excuses for entertaining, lessened her importance and caused her friends to rejoice. And, after her delightful week at the Castle which she had enjoyed so amazingly, the stagnation of Red Meade was tenfold more odious to her than ever, and she found her husband's society intolerable by comparison with Grandston's. Belhaven more often reproached and found fault with than made love to her now, but that did not distress her since one was as irksome as the other, only that it was unbearable to be girded at by one man instead

of having a dozen to worship her and to laud her various perfections. She was terribly afraid too that out of sight with this handsome, spoiled boy was out of mind, and that she would lose by absence the influence which she had gained over him.

My lady's easy temper began to wax snappish—she had fits of crying, quite a novel disorder for her, brought on by the hardship and cruelty of her fate—she took to lying in bed until lunch-time, which was a particularly heinous offence in the eyes of her husband and became the cause of much recrimination between them.

As for Belhaven, he was utterly wretched—everything seemed to go wrong with him. Fate conspired against him to thwart every wish, desire, and plan he formed, and to make him, as he thought, the most unhappy and unfortunate man in Christendom. We know that he was kind of heart but infirm of temper, and the consciousness of this defect added acutely to his other sufferings. If he was morose or said bitter, unkind things, he hated himself for it at the time and afterwards, and would exclaim miserably to himself, "What a brute I am! How could any woman be happy with me!"

Easy-going, good-tempered people, with whom good temper is no more a virtue than the good digestion which it generally accompanies, little dream of the sufferings of those of their fellow-creatures who are cursed with a disposition to irritability.

They do not understand the disorder and have certainly no sympathy with it: perhaps they think their cross and irritable friends enjoy and are made happy by this disagreeable peculiarity of temperament.

Poor Belhaven was not only unhappy by reason of his disappointment in his wife and his hope of children, but he was grievously put out with Cilla. He had begun by having such a high opinion of her; by being so sincerely fond of her, and she had shown herself devoid of heart, good feeling, and principle. If she had gone to him and confessed the truth about her rupture with Duke, he could have forgiven her, but she maintained an impenetrable reserve and refused to give any reason for it. She merely said (and this was by Angie's advice, since the girl's one agonizing desire was to conceal the secret which she felt to be so shameful) that she and Duke had both made up their minds that she was not sufficiently fond of him to marry him, though she would be glad to be friends with him.

From the moment, however, that Belhaven heard of Deerbrook's visit to the Castle, he had not the least doubt as to the cause of the broken engagement. In spite of Dorothea's insisting that they scarcely spoke two words to each other; that, if anything had happened between them, she must infallibly have seen and known it, he adhered to his

opinion. One day Dorothea tentatively broached her husband's theory to her sister.

"Bel says," she commenced abruptly, "that it was Cis who made you give up Duke."

Cilla's heart beat violently, but she answered coldly:

"Mr. Deerbrook is nothing to me. If he had not a wife already, he is the last man I would marry."

Dorothea repeated this triumphantly to Belhaven in confirmation of her previously stated conviction.

Without question, Cilla of the three was the most actively unhappy. The sense of her shame was intolerable to her—sometimes when she remembered that scene in the Castle, she would cover her burning face with her hands even in the night-time. There was ever present with her the terrible thought that Deerbrook would betray her; that his wife would laughingly repeat the story, and that she would be both the jest and scorn of those who heard it.

A sense of utter desolation filled her heart. She missed Duke's love and kindness bitterly—she missed being made much of and treated as a person of consideration. Her sister behaved to her with contemptuous impatience, and Belhaven was utterly changed; cold, distant, unsympathetic. And in the old days, except at the time of her temporary disgrace, they had derived so much comfort and con-

solation from each other's society—she had been able to make up to him for much of Dorothea's neglect, and she had felt that there was at least one person who loved and understood her. Now Belhaven's manner was that of a man alienated and offended beyond remedy, and Cilla felt it impossible to make overtures to him for fear of imperilling her guilty secret. She neither cared to sing nor play nor read, but took long, lonely walks, or sat listless, staring at the fire, and thinking miserably of her lost chances and despairingly of the future. Sometimes she had a wild thought of writing to Duke and asking him to be friends with her and to come and see her, but no! she could never look him in the face again, he knowing what he knew.

Her only comfort was in writing to Mrs. Beauclerc and in hearing from her. She wished ardently that Angie would invite her to stay, but Duke was in town, and therefore it was impossible, as the Beauclercs' house saw more of him than his own.

Two months passed and Lady Belhaven came to the conclusion that life any longer at Red Meade was intolerable, and resolved by fair means or foul to get away from it. She tried fair means first and set herself to cajole her lord to let her go to a hotel in London for two or three weeks before Easter. To her surprise, he yielded without much pressure, and, to her infinite delight, he did not propose to accompany her. She and Cilla, with their

maids, could depart next week, and he would perhaps run up and fetch them at the end of a fortnight or three weeks. He had plenty to occupy him at home.

The reason of Belhaven's acquiescence was that he too found life under existing circumstances intolerable—he realised painfully that Dorothea looked upon him as a gaoler and herself as an unhappy captive; that if she had cared little for him before, she was growing to hate him now, and he resolved to give up the struggle. He felt that love is not to be kept by chains: that he could not make his wife loving or faithful by compulsion; the more he fettered her actions, the further her heart fled from him. Let her go!—let her be happy away from him!—let her do what she chose! As long as he did not see, how would it hurt him! He had no influence over her—he had no confidence in her except that he thought her too selfish to endanger her own position. He even said to himself, with a sort of bitter scorn, that he would have after all to sink into that miserable *rôle* of beauty's husband that he had once so fiercely derided.

From the moment that Dorothea received her husband's permission, she was transformed into the radiant, charming creature of yore. She was imperturbably delightful; embraced Belhaven; sat on his knee, and he, poor fellow! was torn in two by miserable yearnings and contempt for his own weak-

ness, because he perfectly understood that her affection was simply the outcome of her delight at the thought of getting away from him.

Dorothea wrote for rooms to a hotel in Albemarle Street; sent a long letter to Flora Verschoyle full of plans and projects for amusement, and also, with her own fair hands, posted a letter to "The Marquis of Grandston." And in a week from the time when she had first conceived the idea of the trip to London, she was in a whirl of the most delightful dissipation. Luncheons, dinners, plays, supper-parties, varied by the ineffable delight of shopping and spending money. Her sitting-room was always half full of fashionable young men of whom Grandston was the chief, as well as the most frequent and favoured visitor. Everyone recognised and bowed to his superior claims, and no one thought of inviting Lady Belhaven without him.

Dorothea felt her sister to be a very great nuisance, although she was absolutely necessary to her as a chaperon. Cilla did not enter into the spirit of the thing, but, with her great, mournful-looking eyes, threw a sort of *gêne* and gloom over the party.

Truth to tell, Cilla was startled and shocked at the licence and freedom that prevailed, but now she dared not remonstrate because of the secret consciousness of her own wrong-doing. It was very terrible—how could it end? and yet they all seemed

as gay and full of spirits as if it were the most natural and proper state of things. Grandston made open love to her sister without apparently regarding or being aware of her presence, and Dorothea, whilst affecting to treat him rather as a spoiled child, gave him evident encouragement. Several of the men who came tried to make love to Cilla, but she had taken a sort of disgust for men—as long as they were simply friendly, she liked them, but the moment they grew warmer, she experienced a feeling of coldness and repulsion. She was offended too by the familiar manner of these gilded youths, and, many a time, her cheeks tingled at hints and allusions which, if she did not perfectly understand, she knew to be gross and unfit for modest ears. Yet they did not appear to mean any disrespect—they were much less careful before other women—it was only a way which seemed the fashion and which appeared to be appreciated rather than resented in the set in which they moved.

Cilla was behind the age—she was not a girl of the period. She was modest and pure of heart notwithstanding her error. Had she not been so, she would not have suffered such terrible remorse for it.

She was heartily glad when Belhaven came to fetch them. Everything was changed then—very few men called—Grandston vanished from the scene altogether, and Dorothea only met him at Flora

Verschoyle's. She behaved with great discretion; treated her husband with more consideration than she had done for months previously, and as a reward, he hired a house in May Fair for the season and was actually persuaded to take them to Paris instead of Red Meade for Easter.

Dorothea had been so amiable; their relations had been so friendly for the last fortnight that poor Belhaven again began to cherish some of the illusions to which he thought he had bidden farewell for ever. He fell in love with his beautiful wife once more, forgave and forgot all the past, and hoped and believed that a new era had commenced and that it might yet be well with them. A rude awakening awaited him. No sooner were they settled in town for the season than her ladyship threw off all restraint and showed him that she intended to follow her own sweet will without the least reference to his feelings or opinions. She made parties to the play without including him—she went everywhere with Flora Verschoyle in defiance of his wishes; she had men lounging in her drawing-room of an afternoon; she had shoals of admirers in attendance upon her whenever she appeared in public.

One or two violent scenes took place between my lord and my lady, but now she defied him openly and declared that she *would* have the freedom that other women enjoyed, and that she *would not*

lead the wretched, miserable life that she had hitherto done.

Belhaven had furious thoughts of giving up the house and insisting on her accompanying him abroad or home to Red Meade, but she told him plainly that she would not leave London and that, if he gave up the house, she would go to Flora Verschoyle, and all the world should know what a brutal tyrant he was. And when he reflected calmly what sort of life he was likely to lead with her if he tore her by force from all she cared for, he was fain to confess that his idea was utterly, hopelessly impossible. He recognised at last that this pretty, gentle-looking creature had a more resolute and indomitable will than his own, and that whereas he could be easily moved and affected by the sight of her pain and unhappiness, she was utterly indifferent to his most cruel sufferings, and had only one object in life which was to have her own way. So he had recourse to his old expedient of trying not to see. He only accompanied her to formal parties—he never entered his own house in the afternoon—he saw as little of his beautiful wife as possible.

Dorothea was delighted, and boasted to Flora that she had at last got Bel into perfect training. There are, however, limits to human endurance, and Belhaven's training was not yet so complete that he could submit to have every idea that he most cherished trampled upon. He was walking one day

in a street near the Park and stopped before a shop in which photographs of the fashionable beauties were displayed. His heart literally stood still with anger as he recognised his wife's picture amongst them. The first impulse of his hasty temper was to march into the shop, ask the proprietor what he meant by his impudence, and demand that all her ladyship's "counterfeit presentments" should be instantly delivered up to him. But he checked himself and walked rapidly away to the Park, where, at the end of twenty minutes, he recovered his calmness, and decided upon an entirely different plan of action.

He returned to the shop and, entering, quietly asked to look at some photographs. He was served by a young man of familiar and engaging manners who treated him with good-natured condescension. He did not for an instant suspect his customer of being a lord—as Dorothea had playfully said, "Bel ought to have his rank written on his back."

Belhaven selected two or three portraits of well-known beauties and then said that there was one in the window he should like to possess. He was invited to go outside and point to it.

"Oh yes," said the shopman with a smile of intelligence when he returned—"that's a very favourite one. Lady Bel'aven. We've sold more of that this last fortnight than any other. I think myself she's the best-looking of the lot."

Poor Belhaven ground his teeth.

"We've got her in another position," pursued the engaging youth—"shows her figure off better—in a low neck," and he proceeded to search amongst a pile of photographs, whilst Belhaven, scarcely able to control his passion, hid his face behind a screen of pictures. "Here it is," said the man, presently producing it with an air of triumph and pausing first to take a lingering and admiring look at it before handing it over the counter.

Belhaven was obliged to turn away as he looked at it; so fierce was his indignation. Had not his wife heard him inveigh a thousand times against the women who permitted their half-clothed charms to be publicly exhibited; nay, sold for a couple of shillings to adorn the room of any man who chose to buy, from the highest to the lowest.

He had not seen this particular photograph and it seemed to him the most shameless and immodest one he had ever set eyes on. But that was only because it was the picture of *his* wife.

To crown his fury, the shopman remarked with a simper seeing how intently he was gazing at it,

"That's the one all the gents buy."

"Have you any more pictures of—Lady Belhaven?" asked the wretched husband when he could control his voice sufficiently to put the question.

"No," was the answer. "There's been such a run on them. But we shall get a fresh lot in to-morrow, I expect. There's one other position."

"I will take these two," said Belhaven, and the man put them into an envelope and the purchaser paid for them and departed. He jumped into a Hansom and drove to the photographer's, trying his very hardest to restrain the fury that filled his heart. He felt that it was absolutely necessary to be calm and quiet. He half expected that the man would refuse to give up the negatives or refrain from selling copies.

He was however mistaken. The head of the establishment on hearing the name of his visitor and his object in calling, acceded at once with perfect politeness and readiness to his wish, and even expressed regret that the photographs should have been sold without his lordship's sanction. He had orders for a couple of hundred more of her ladyship's portraits and these were now being printed, but they should be destroyed unless his lordship would like to have them. But his lordship preferred that they should be destroyed.

Then he took his way home, but no amount of resolution could make him meet Dorothea with calmness. He gave vent to his burning indignation in terms that frightened his wife, although she declared with tears and sobs that she knew nothing about her picture being in the shops, and had never authorised the sale of it.

But she could not deny, in face of the copy which Belhaven produced, that she had sat in a very

décolletée dress to the "artist." The indignant husband put it in much coarser terms.

Dorothea was not at all ashamed in her heart. All the other beauties did it, she said to herself—her frock wasn't any lower than theirs, not so low as Mrs.——'s.

She was dining with Flora that night. Grandston was there and they went to the play afterwards. During the performance, she confided to him her husband's cruelty, and he swore with all a boy's impetuosity that Belhaven was a brute who was not fit to live, and that he would give all he had to be able to protect her from such infamous treatment.

Belhaven scarcely knew Grandston even by sight, and did not distinguish him from half a dozen others of the "gardenia brigade" who surrounded his wife when she appeared in public. Dorothea's name was freely coupled with that of the Marquis by the world, but the world did not take Belhaven into its confidence. One of its units did, however, and was kind enough to write him an anonymous letter on the subject of her ladyship's flirtation.

CHAPTER XVI.

Belhaven, with the instinct of a gentleman, flung the anonymous missive into the fire. Unfortunately he could not burn the recollection of it and found himself wondering fifty times that day and every day that followed if there was any truth in it. He had suffered terrible pangs of jealousy at seeing Dorothea exercise her fascinations over other men, but, until this moment, he had never been jealous of any one man in particular, except, perhaps, of Deerbrook during his two days' visit to Red Meade. Of late he had fancied, his love for his beautiful wife being so largely leavened with contempt and disgust, that he was no longer likely to be personally jealous of her; or that any feeling of jealousy he might entertain would be solely for his honour's sake. But the fury that rushed into his heart each time he remembered the accusation of her being in love with Grandston, came to him as a revelation. Mercifully, he had not even the smallest suspicion how far this flirtation had gone. He was ignorant that Grandston was his wife's constant attendant in public; that if any woman wanted the honour of his lordship's company at her lunch or dinner-table,

Lady Belhaven was first invited; that, by common consent, the chair next her was left vacant for him; that everyone gave place to him the moment he approached her.

The Marquis, being only a boy and a spoilt boy, never for one instant entertained the manly idea of preserving his mistress's name from scandal, but indeed gloried and delighted in demonstrating his admiration and affection for her before the world. And, if a man does not think for a woman, she very rarely thinks for herself, but rather likes than not to be placarded about with her admirer, particularly if he is as highly placed as Grandston. His lordship displayed a hieroglyph of brilliants in the centre of his shirt in evening-dress, and of course no one could read that it spelt Thea—her ladyship wore studs with the pet name of the Marquis, also in brilliants, in her sleeves—this they no doubt also believed to be a secret known only to themselves. Each possessed half a dozen of the other's photographs: Grandston was having one of Dorothea's enlarged and beautifully painted for his own delight and also a miniature of himself for a locket to be worn by her.

Dorothea was becoming a good deal bolder than formerly. It was some time since her husband had exhibited any jealousy or asked questions about her movements. Two of Grandston's likenesses embellished her drawing-room; one in an ordinary frame

on the chimney-piece, another in purple velvet surmounted by a coronet. This was placed in a more retired situation on a small table with flowers and silver knick-knacks, and enamel scent-bottles, and snuff-boxes. Belhaven saw it for the first time on the day that he received the anonymous letter. This was not a coincidence, for he had gone into the room on a tour of investigation to look for Grandston's photograph and to study his rival's features. One of his sudden fits of fury came upon him at sight of the confident, smiling, good-looking face, and it was with considerable difficulty that he restrained himself from dashing it on the floor and grinding case, coronet, and picture under his heel. The conceit of the young fool to have his coronet, forsooth, stuck above his pretty face, but that Marquis's coronet, he thought bitterly to himself, was no doubt the great attraction in Dorothea's eyes.

Contrary to his habit, he made his appearance in his wife's drawing-room at six o'clock that afternoon. Grandston was there, leaning familiarly with his back to the fire: Dorothea in a lovely tea-gown was half reclined in a low chair, looking up at him: there was no one else present.

Grandston, who had a charming manner, treated Belhaven to his very best specimen of it on this occasion, and his unhappy and unwilling host could not altogether resist the influence of it and behaved to him with a great deal more courtesy and civility

than he had intended. All his rage was against Dorothea, and yet he could not drive away the reflection that it was hardly strange she should like this handsome lad's society and contrast him with himself.

It was evident that Lord Belhaven had come with the intention of remaining, so Grandston presently took his leave, and his host followed him out of the room and down the stairs. Instead of returning to the drawing-room where her ladyship was expecting him with considerable trepidation, he went and shut himself in his own room where he remained an hour, a prey to the bitterest feelings he had ever known. If he had been only a jealous, ill-tempered man like a good many others, he might have found some satisfaction in thoughts of vengeance; in plans for coercing his wife to discretion and preventing her meetings with young Antinous. But, along with his failings, he had a great sense of justice and fair play, and that kindness of heart which was his bane, because it was always at war with his impulse to anger, so that he was constantly torn in two by his conflicting passions and endured terrible mental suffering in consequence. If he could only have been one thing or the other—an ill-tempered, violent brute without remorse or pity, or a good-natured, easy-going man, to whom it was no effort to let unpleasant things "slide!"

As he strode up and down his room he was

thinking with bitter anger of his wife; of her selfishness, her vanity, her utter want of regard for him or his feelings. No doubt she was in love with this boy (and, at the bare thought, a wild fury filled Belhaven's heart): no doubt there was plenty of truth in that accursed letter.

But here the other voice broke in and said cruelly to him,

"Is it not natural enough? Are they not both young and handsome and fond of pleasure? What attributes have you to win or keep a woman's love? You are unhandsome; you have an ungracious manner; you are ill-tempered—in what respect can you attempt to compete with Grandston? Yes, it is quite true that she is yours by right; that she owes everything to you; that you can even prevent her from seeing and speaking to him, but how will that help you? Can you compel her to love you and to be indifferent to him?"

When an hour, an hour full of torment, had passed, he was no nearer to making up his mind what to do about Grandston than at the first moment—indeed he was much further off, because then he had resolved that the Marquis should not set foot in the house again.

At dinner he was morose and silent. Dorothea was frightened and gave herself unusual trouble to make conversation and to be civil to him. Cilla saw that something was wrong and was a prey to

divided feelings—the fear of a rupture between him and her sister and the hope that he might put a stop to Dorothea's flirtation, which filled her with uneasiness and often with indignation. She had remonstrated once, and her ladyship had retorted scornfully,

"You had better mind your own business. I don't think *you* need say anything!"

It was entirely a random shaft, but it went home none the less. It made her think that Dorothea knew all, and silenced her for ever.

Dorothea was dressing for a dance when a knock, which she recognised as her husband's, came at the door. She had just time to throw her white cloak over a bouquet on the table before he entered.

"I want to speak to you," he said coldly, and she made a sign to her maid to go, and turned a smiling though a very pale face towards her lord. She was trembling and her heart beat much faster than usual.

"Yes, dear?" she said in a voice whose expression was strangely altered from its customary indifference. "What is it?"

"It is about Lord Grandston," he replied trying to speak coldly. And he looked searchingly at her.

"Yes? What about him?"

"I had an anonymous letter about him this morning," pursued Belhaven—"about him and you."

"About him and me!" echoed Dorothea laughing, but not very naturally or easily. "How utterly ridiculous!"

"Why ridiculous?" said Belhaven sternly. Her acting was not good enough to deceive him.

"A boy like that!" and my lady tried to put an inflexion of scornful amusement into her voice.

"How old is he?" inquired Belhaven.

"Oh, about eighteen or nineteen, I suppose," answered Dorothea. It was just two months since she had sent him a present on his twentieth birthday. "He is a nice, amusing boy—but an anonymous letter! How too ridiculous! What wretches people are! Well, what did it say?"

"I hardly know," replied Belhaven. "I put it behind the fire after one look. But the drift of it was clear enough. However, what I have to say to you is this. I will not have my wife's name coupled with that of either man or *boy*," with meaning. "I will not have fellows lounging about my house of an afternoon, and I request," with growing anger, "that you will remove the portrait of Lord Grandston which is embellished by his coronet to a less conspicuous place than it occupies at present."

He feels his dreadful temper getting the better of him and prepares to retreat. In passing the table, he brushes the cloak—it falls and reveals the exquisite white bouquet over which it had been hastily flung.

"Where did this come from?" he asked angrily.

"I ordered it," answered Dorothea pale as death. "I suppose I can do as I please with my own money."

"Infernal extravagance!" muttered Belhaven taking it up in his hand.

Underneath lay an unopened note, on which was blazoned the same coronet as that surmounting Grandston's portrait.

For an instant Belhaven hesitated—an almost irresistible impulse urged him to tear open the note—then he dashed the bouquet on the table and rushed from the room.

Another moment and my lady had flung the unopened letter into the fire. Belhaven might change his mind and return. She did not suppose there was anything in the note, but it was as well to be on the safe side. And in half an hour she would see Grandston.

From this evening Lady Belhaven enjoyed far less freedom than she had done for some time previously. It was perfectly obvious that her husband was keeping watch over her movements and endeavouring to ascertain for himself how much truth lay in that anonymous letter. He generally came in to lunch now; invaded the drawing-room at all hours, and gave so cool a reception to any of his sex whom he found in his wife's company that it was some time ere they ventured to repeat the

visit. He asked every day what her plans were—if she expressed an intention of going to the play, he desired that a place might be taken for him also. To her disgust and annoyance, he began to accompany her to balls and dances and kept vigilant watch over her when there. She could not see Grandston half as often as formerly nor sit out dances with him in spots tempting to solitude. The Marquis chafed and was furious; wanted to defy "that brute" as he called Dorothea's lord, but her ladyship, knowing that such rashness would precipitate the end of all things, restrained him. He grew sulky—between the pair she had a very indifferent time. Then she became worried and harassed and had serious thoughts of giving up her new *rôle* of submission and sweetness to her husband and of telling him that she would do as she pleased, and that she cared a thousand times more for Grandston than for him. His behaviour annoyed her intensely—he said nothing, but he watched her as a dog watches some one of whom he entertains suspicion. And when she was with Grandston, there was always a threatening look in his eyes—so that she dared not flirt nor return the young fellow's glances as she had been wont to do.

Over Cilla a sort of stagnation appeared to have crept. She was not actually unhappy—her power of suffering seemed benumbed—she was indifferent to everything except an occasional intense yearning for

sympathy and kindness. She went out a great deal; being always invited with Dorothea; she danced; she rode—not Duke's chestnut which Belhaven had returned—she talked to men and they made love to her. Their speeches fell utterly flat upon her ear—if she felt anything, it was a sensation between mirth and contempt. She had become very much the fashion—her pale, strange kind of beauty attracted men and her coldness and insensibility piqued them. Her nature was too sympathetic to permit of her ever being rude or unkind—she was simply indifferent. She looked at them with those beautiful eyes behind which the fires of volcanoes seemed to lie, and said she was incapable of feeling. They were exasperated at such a wanton falsehood; but she said it and thought it sincerely enough. There was only one thing she desired ardently—that was to be once more friends with Duke—only friends. She acknowledged him in her heart as the kindest and truest of men and would have liked to think that he felt kindly to her instead of despising her. She did not dare to hint this even to Angie lest she might be misunderstood—she did not want him for a lover or a husband—she had had enough of love. Love! was there such a thing? or was it only a beautiful mirage that women followed until it ruined their lives and broke their hearts?

She met Duke sometimes in society. They always exchanged bows but he never spoke to her.

Occasionally he said a few words to Dorothea. Her ladyship frequently wore his pearl-necklace with the diamond clasps, at which Cilla was deeply indignant. She wanted it returned to Duke along with his other costly presents. Belhaven would have been furious had he known how her ladyship had behaved in the matter, but she took care that he should not know. When she met Duke, she would call his attention to them, if they happened to adorn her on the occasion, and would say,

"I know it will come all right one day. I am keeping them till then."

And Duke would make a grave inclination of the head and keep silence. He knew it could never come right. He told himself that, knowing what he knew, he would not marry Cilla now if she went on her knees to him; but when he saw her, a passionate pang smote his heart and he felt that he had lost the thing which once made life sweet to him. He was more devoted than ever to Angie; lived more in her society. The world could not belaud her cleverness enough. It was quite convinced that she had separated him from Miss St. George.

The season was at its height; Ascot impending. Dorothea had, months before, given her promise that she and Cilla would join a party to be formed for Ascot week, and Lord Grandston had, as a matter of course, been invited at the same time. There was one guest however upon whom no one

had counted. Lord Belhaven would be asked, of course, and just as much of course, (as he detested racing and race-courses), he would decline. But to the consternation of everyone except Cilla, he desired his wife in a cheerful tone to accept the invitation for him.

Poor Belhaven was playing a part; trying too to play it with a smiling face whilst he was suffering the most infernal tortures. He was madly jealous. He had seen long enough ago how things were between Dorothea and Grandston, but he did not dare to take any strong measure for fear of driving her to desperation: he thought to keep the world from talking by going everywhere with her. He watched them together. Every look that Grandston bent on her tortured him. Every time he whispered in her willing ear, Belhaven with difficulty controlled his rage and misery. Sometimes he hated his wife; sometimes his old idolatry of her beauty returned with ten-fold force: there were moments when he felt himself capable of strangling her so that no other man might look upon or love her—anon he could have grovelled at her feet in an agony of self-abasement.

These conflicting feelings were telling terribly upon him. He could not sleep, his appetite was capricious; there was a wild, hunted expression about his eyes which made his friends look askance at him. Dorothea was too angry and embittered to

care how he looked or what he suffered. She was harassed by his vigilance and distracted by Grandston's reproaches and ill-humour. He could not stand it, he vowed. Life was not worth having. And all one evening, he devoted himself in Dorothea's presence to a new star which had lately appeared above the horizon of fashion. Belhaven was filled with a wild rapture. This was what he had hoped for. He would tire Grandston out and Grandston would turn his eyes elsewhere. There were plenty of beautiful women waiting for him.

Dorothea had grown desperate by the time the party assembled for the Ascot meeting. She resolved to throw off her yoke; she would no longer temporise with her husband; her vanity was at stake as well as the small portion of heart which she possessed. She was a beautiful woman—homage and admiration were her due; husband or no husband, she would have them. And she did. At the races she was the cynosure of all eyes; many people pronounced her the most beautiful as well as the best-dressed woman in the Royal Enclosure. Royalty marked her out for especial distinction; the outside throng came to gaze at her—she was radiant with pleasure and triumph, whilst Belhaven stood by suffering unknown torments, seeing and acknowledging himself the victim of a doom which he had of all others feared and hated. He was "beauty's husband"; the ignored, despised possessor of the

woman who was the fashion of the hour—he, whose dream had been domestic happiness, love, sympathy. Her ladyship took not the smallest notice of him: she flirted and laughed and amused herself as though he had been a hundred miles away, and he stood there, wretched and heart-broken, fighting a fierce battle with his own heart and striving to control himself lest he should break out and make a scene which would for ever render him ridiculous. He was quite resolved on one point: this should be the last of her triumph and his martyrdom: after this she should either yield to his opinion and give up Grandston, or there should be a separation between them—she should no longer mock and deride him and set his authority and feelings at naught.

He had meant to wait until they were back in town before coming to an explanation with her, but on the last evening of their stay, she flirted so outrageously with Grandston that he could no longer control himself, and when the party separated for the night, went to her room to speak his mind.

Grandston, with boyish vanity, seeing the admiration which Lady Belhaven excited, had returned gladly to his allegiance and paid her the most marked attention. Dorothea was triumphant; her success made her utterly reckless; she neither thought nor cared about consequences.

When Belhaven reproached her violently and threatened her with the future, she leaned back in

her chair with a provokingly indifferent smile and did not answer by so much as a word. He became exasperated almost beyond endurance—her silence made him say more than he had even intended. And, wrought up to frenzy, he cried,

"By God! if I thought there was anything between you and that boy more than your cursed vanity, I would shoot him like a dog!"

Then Dorothea, whose vindictive feelings had been gathering strength during his passionate outbreak, looked up at him and spoke. She felt nothing but a desire to hurt and wound and stab him.

"There is this much between us," she said in a hard voice, "that I love him as much as I hate you."

Her words produced on Belhaven the effect of a paralytic stroke. Instead of augmenting his fury, they struck him dumb; he was seized with a sudden icy coldness as though his heart had turned to stone; as though he had got his death-blow. He stared dumbly at her—that beautiful, soft-looking woman who gazed unblenchingly in his face and uttered this speech of unparalleled cruelty and shamelessness. For a minute he stood with his eyes fixed upon her as though she were some horrid spectre; then he turned and staggered out of the room.

When the door closed upon him, Dorothea uttered a little mocking laugh.

"Thank Heaven for that!" she said, and betook herself to bed where she slept soundly, whilst, in the adjoining room, Belhaven sat stunned and stupefied until the morning. His wife's words rang in his ears like a death-knell. Oh, Heaven! if he could but die himself and have done with this intolerable suffering and misery!

At breakfast next morning when he saw Dorothea, fresh, beautiful, smiling; without a trace of feeling on her fair face, and Grandston hanging over her, the frenzy crept back to his heart—he understood now how men murdered women for jealousy. A little more self-command—the week's martyrdom was nearly over; but, meantime, he was frightened at his own sensations—he felt as though his self-command would not last much longer.

They were at the station. A great many people, guests from neighbouring houses, were waiting for the train—amongst them was Duke Vereker, standing not far from the Belhaven party. Grandston came up to Dorothea and whispered,

"I have ordered my coach to meet me at Kingston. Will you drive up to town from there with me?"

"I shall be delighted," she answered.

Belhaven heard the whisper and her reply.

"You shall *not* go. I forbid you!" he uttered fiercely.

She turned towards him, looked calmly in his face, and said with cool determination,

"I *shall* go!"

There was a movement on the platform.

"Stand back for the express!" cried a porter.

Cilla was talking to one of the party—her back was towards her sister. Suddenly she heard a shriek; the thunder of the train; and, in a moment, she was caught by the arm and dragged forcibly inside the station and into the waiting-room. It was the work of a second. She found herself standing face to face with Duke, white as death, and with an expression of stony horror on his every lineament.

"What is it?" she gasped.

"An accident," he muttered. "Stop here till I bring your sister. Promise me not to stir from this."

"Who is it?" she asked, trembling with terror.

"Poor Belhaven. He is run over by the express."

She sank almost fainting on a seat. Even then she did not grasp the awful truth. Mercifully it was only known to Duke and one or two others, who kept their own counsel as he did.

He had been watching the group. He saw Grandston approach, saw Belhaven turn furiously to his wife, and was witness of her glance of cool

defiance. Then he saw a desperate look leap into Belhaven's eyes; saw him make a step forward and jump from the platform as the train dashed up.

Everyone else—almost everyone else—thought it was an accident. Perhaps Lady Belhaven knew differently. If she did, she never by word or sign gave any hint of her knowledge.

CHAPTER XVII.

Six months have passed since the "Terrible and fatal accident to Viscount Belhaven" was chronicled in the daily papers and furnished paragraphs for the "Society Journals." Great, deep, universal was the sympathy expressed for the young and beautiful Viscountess under her awful bereavement—touching pictures were drawn of the broken-hearted lady who so lately was the admired of all observers, the most brilliant and beautiful in a circle where these attributes were the rule, not the exception. Thousands of cards were left at the house in May Fair—hundreds of letters of condolence—the most exalted personages in England sent their kindly tribute of sympathy. It was some small consolation to think one had so many friends, murmured the bereaved one pathetically.

It would be quite untrue to say that Dorothea was not terribly shocked and grieved and shaken by the awful tragedy which she had brought about, but it was an intense relief to her that her husband's death was universally treated as an accident, and that no paper, wishing to seem better informed than

its fellows, gave the least hint or innuendo of suicide.

As a matter of fact, there were only three people who knew the truth—herself, Grandston, and Duke. It was a significant fact that Grandston neither called nor sent to inquire after her for several days, but took occasion to run over to Paris. From that Dorothea correctly argued that he knew the truth and had a guilty, uncomfortable feeling at being, however indirectly, concerned in Belhaven's death.

One cannot drive away one's secret thoughts, and Dorothea was tormented day and night by speculations as to whether Grandston would marry her. That he should was the one aim and object of her life, and now there was no sin, whatever indelicacy there might be, in confessing to herself that she loved him. More, ay, far more than she had ever loved anyone but herself. And then, to have not only the man she cared for but a Marquis who would be enormously rich when he attained his majority.

When they met, each carefully avoided all allusion to the terrible scene at the station—the dead man's name was never once mentioned between them.

Lady Belhaven turned over a dozen plans in her head before she decided upon one. She must not stay in London—it would not do for her to be seen in the Park nor in a shop nor at a friend's house—

she certainly would not go to that detested Red Meade which Lord Belhaven's heir and successor begged her to make her home as long as she pleased. Under any circumstances, many months of dulness, seclusion, and quiet were unavoidable: the only chance there was of her enjoying Grandston's society or indulging in any freedom at all was by going abroad. She was dreadfully discontented at what she considered her poverty, though she had a jointure of eighteen hundred a year besides her own six hundred, and the interest of fifteen thousand pounds left her by her husband. But latterly she had conceived very extravagant ideas of the style in which it befitted a Viscountess to live and to travel, let alone a future Marchioness. For she did solemnly believe in her heart that if she could only keep Grandston under her own eye and away from the influence of his sister, he would indubitably make her Lady Grandston.

She decided upon Switzerland, where at that early season there would not be many English travellers, and Grandston promised, eagerly enough, to join her there. So, three weeks after Belhaven's death, Dorothea and Cilla left England for the Continent.

It was with no pleasurable emotions or expectations that Cilla started on her journey. She and Dorothea had never had much in common, and, of late, there had been a kind of smothered antagonism

between them. Cilla disapproved most strongly of her sister's conduct, and Lady Belhaven resented to the last degree Cilla's unspoken though evident disapprobation. And, for some reason or other, Cilla positively disliked Grandston and treated him with a coldness which piqued and angered him extremely. My lady's temper was very much altered from its former sweet placidity, but then, in her girlish days, there had been nothing to ruffle it. She was idolized by her mother, who made everything smooth and pleasant for her, and their ideas on all subjects were so perfectly in unison that there was never any question of disagreement between them. But, of late, she had been living in a state of perpetual strife and warfare: her views and her husband's were diametrically opposed—her love of pleasure and her vanity were constantly being thwarted by him—she had to endure contradictions and a despotism that was new to her. It *was* despotism—why should she not have her own way and do exactly what she pleased!

Cilla she had never cared for—now she positively disliked her, knowing that the girl had always been on Belhaven's side, even though she kept silence. Dorothea would have been delighted to get rid of her and to hire a travelling companion, but she could not afford to dispense with Cilla's income, which would go towards paying expenses. Cilla's eyes were worse than a conscience: there was always

that sad, reproachful look in them when she saw wrong done, or what she thought wrong.

Poor Cilla! Now Belhaven was gone, she felt herself indeed to be alone in the world. She forgot there had ever been any estrangement between them and only thought of him as the kindest, best friend she had ever had.

When, only five weeks after his terrible death, she saw Dorothea in the highest spirits, not only allowing Grandston to make love to her, but encouraging him to the utmost, and showing her feelings for him without the least reserve, Cilla was disgusted and pained beyond expression. It revolted, not only her heart, but her sense of decency, and she avoided their company as much as possible. Dorothea was only too delighted to be rid of her and was never weary of abusing her to Grandston, but he seemed rather to take her behaviour to heart and to be piqued and annoyed by it. He even tried to conciliate her, much to Dorothea's annoyance, but Cilla retained her invariable air of distant politeness and was not to be propitiated. She was indignant with him for making open love to her sister when poor Belhaven was only just dead—she resented too the familiarity of his behaviour and the laxness of his conversation. When he said things that made Cilla's ears tingle and her cheeks burn with anger, Dorothea laughed and seemed delighted—whatever affection Grandston might enter-

tain for her, it was evident that he had but little respect for or awe of her.

He did not attempt to conceal the fact that his sister, the Duchess of Kingscourt, was violently prejudiced against her and never left a stone unturned to get him away from her. This was a dreadful mortification to Dorothea, who, in revenge, used her utmost efforts to estrange him from the Duchess and partially succeeded in her design.

There was no doubt that Grandston was very much in love with her ladyship; but still, he had not said anything about marriage—he had been pursued so often and so ardently during the last three years, that he had grown wary and was always on his guard about proposals and promises. It is even possible that he rather regretted Belhaven's death than otherwise though he vastly enjoyed the present state of affairs. To make unrestrained love to a beautiful woman in charming summer weather amongst exquisite scenes cannot fail to be delightful to a young fellow full of life and spirits. Perhaps Dorothea's pleasure was not so unalloyed: Grandston had not the best temper in the world nor was he by any means careful of restraining it in her presence, and she was afraid of him. He was subject to fits of petulance; he could not brook the least opposition—if everything did not run on castors; if everyone he met did not know and kou-tou to his rank, he grew imperious and dis-

pleased. He expected everything to give way before him as it did in his own country. Cilla was offended at his displays of temper and imperiousness and showed him her displeasure plainly, and it positively had the effect of making him now and then try to curb his irritability in her presence. Nothing vexed Dorothea more than to see Grandston defer to her sister—Cilla had a very bad time indeed with her ladyship when they were alone.

When Grandston intimated that he must positively return to England to be present at Goodwood, Lady Belhaven was deeply mortified. For the first time she made a scene, during which Grandston smoked a cigarette and gave evidence of an insensibility that filled her with consternation. But, young as he was, he had already gone through a good many scenes and heard a great number of reproaches from the fair, and was experienced enough to be able to wait with calmness until the lady came round again. It was against Dorothea, as it is against every indiscreet woman, that she let Grandston see how fond she was of him. Perhaps, in those days of tremulous doubt and anxiety, she remembered how poor Belhaven had hung upon her smiles and agonised for kind and tender words from her.

Grandston's passion was far more stimulated in society where other men were contending for her smiles and where it was a triumph for him to be

first favourite than here where he had her undisputed to himself. Dorothea was painfully conscious of this and bitterly lamented her forced exile from the gay world.

Next year! But by this time next year she had ardently hoped to be Marchioness of Grandston.

When he left her, she was utterly wretched. Her lovely eyes grew dim with constant tears: Cilla felt quite sorry for her. Dorothea had a miserable intuition of how gay and happy Grandston was, being cajoled and flattered by a host of pretty women who were taking delighted advantage of her absence whilst she was so dull and unhappy away from him. She wrote him daily the most affectionate letters to which he sent short and infrequent answers; not because his love for her had decreased, but because, when one is in a whirl and vortex of pleasure and gaiety, one has little time or inclination for writing.

Worst of all, he gave no hint of returning. There was the Cowes week and a short yachting trip after that, then Scotland. When with her, he had promised to return immediately after Cowes, but now each letter spoke of fresh engagements.

Dorothea was unhappy, and, being unhappy, grew ill-tempered, and Cilla suffered in consequence. Once now and then, her fiery spirit would break out and she would let her sister know that there was a limit to endurance, but, as a rule, she bore

wearily with her ladyship's snappishness, thinking it was a wretched world and that her doom was always to suffer in one way or another. Her mind constantly reverted to the happy time spent last year with Duke and Angie when there was no quarrelling nor bickering but everyone was kind, happy, and good-tempered.

In those days she remembered, bitterly enough, she had been the first thought and care of everyone; now she was treated worse than a hired companion and made to feel small and snubbed every hour of the day.

And Duke! how good he had been to her! how tender, how thoughtful, how devoted! She contrasted his behaviour with Grandston's to Dorothea. And she had wilfully thrown away her chance of happiness—nay, not wilfully—it was Kismet.

December found the sisters back in London to the satisfaction of both. Lady Belhaven had been tormented by fear and doubt as long as she was out of the country. Grandston had only paid her two flying visits since July, and she heard dreadful rumours of his attentions to a certain Mrs. Vernon. Her only chance seemed to lie in being on the spot, but she had terrible doubts about the seriousness of his intentions towards her. She did not dare to try to bring him to the point lest he might take flight altogether.

Cilla was rejoiced to be in England again. She was devoted to her own country, and life, with Dorothea as her sole companion, had been almost unbearable. My lady never thought it necessary to consult her sister about their movements nor to consider her in any way. Sometimes she would scarcely speak to her for days together and then probably only opened her lips to say something disagreeable. She was certainly a very different person from the placid, smiling Dorothea of yore. Her anxiety and uncertainty had made her temper shrewish, and as she was utterly devoid of any sense of justice or fairness, she did not attempt to check or govern her irritability.

It was with the greatest joy that Cilla went, the day after her return, to see Angie, having first prepared her friend for her visit by letter. When she felt that kind lady's arm round her and her kiss on her cheek, it seemed as if she had regained a long-lost mother. She was constantly with Angie now; her only regret was that her presence in Mrs. Beauclerc's house seemed to have the effect of driving Duke away from it. He was sometimes actually in the house when she arrived, but always made a point of escaping without meeting her. One day she said to Angie with tears in her eyes,

"I wish Duke would not always run away when I come. I should be so glad to be friends with him. Why should he avoid me?"

Angie repeated her words to Duke, but he only shook his head and said,

"It is of no use opening old wounds. I could never be only friends with her, and I have lost all wish to be anything else. No, I am content with things as they are. I don't bear any malice against her, poor little girl, but I don't want to get upset again."

Angie, as kindly as possible, told Cilla what Duke said, and, after that, the girl forbore to speak of him. She felt wounded, saddened, humiliated. But she was comparatively happy now she had exchanged Dorothea's companionship for Angie's; my lady had her friend Flora Verschoyle and was delighted to get rid of her sister.

When she met Flora for the first time after her return, that lady had said with a meaning smile,

"Well, my dear, have you any news for me?" and Dorothea, blushing vividly, had answered with some petulance,

"I don't know what you mean."

Unfortunately for herself, however, she knew only too well.

A new complication presently arose which threatened to cause her ladyship more heart-burning and wretchedness than she had yet known. Grandston came constantly to the hotel where she was staying; but instead of devoting himself exclusively to her as formerly, he was constantly

talking to Cilla, and Lady Belhaven saw, with ill-concealed rage, that his manner to her sister was much more deferential and respectful than to herself. Cilla remained unchanged—she was still coldly polite—she had never liked Grandston—his spoiled, selfish ways disgusted her, and she would always rather have avoided his company if possible.

Grandston, piqued and irritated by such unusual treatment, had already begun to feel a wish to conquer her indifference when a circumstance occurred which gave a decided stimulus to his desire. He and another man had been dining with the sisters, and about eleven o'clock took their departure together. Grandston's companion was a man highly-placed in society; a great favourite with women and an authority on that delicate subject.

"Grandy," he said suddenly as they were walking down St. James's Street. "I think you've made a mistake."

"How?" asked Grandston.

"Why, in devoting yourself to the widow instead of the girl. Of course if you've no serious intentions it don't matter, but it is pretty clear Lady Belhaven has made up her mind to have you."

Grandston laughed rather a fatuous laugh.

"I don't know when I've been so taken with anyone as that girl," proceeded his friend. "By George! if I hadn't got a wife, I should think very seriously about her. She'll make a perfect *grande*

dame one of these days, and, talk about heart and soul!—she's got fifty thousand times more than that vain doll, her sister. I never saw a more refined, intelligent creature—a delightful change from most of the women one meets."

"She don't like me," answered Grandston half reluctantly.

"I expect that's your fault," laughed the other, good-humouredly. "You don't often fail when you've made up your mind to please, eh?"

This set Grandston thinking seriously. It was rather a *piquante* situation—to throw one sister over for the other—it would have to be done under the rose, but the difficulty of the enterprise would lend a charm to it. As his lordship possessed very little heart, he had few scruples on the score of what his desertion might cost Dorothea. Indeed he was not at all sure that he ever had meant to marry her—fortunately he had not compromised himself by a declaration. Yes, he decided that there was something very fetching about Cilla, and that, to make her care for him when she had all along been so disdainful and indifferent would indeed be a triumph. He actually could not go to sleep for thinking of her that night—next day if he got a chance he resolved to break the ice.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CILLA was standing at the drawing-room window waiting for Mrs. Beauclerc, who had promised to drive her out. Dorothea was lunching with Flora Verschoyle.

The door was thrown open and Lord Grandston announced. Cilla turned to greet him, saying, as she held out her hand,

"My sister is not at home. She will not be back before five o'clock."

"I know," replied Grandston. "They told me downstairs that she was out. I came to see you."

He did not think it necessary to inform her that he had left Mrs. Verschoyle's luncheon-table in the hope and expectation of finding her here alone.

"I am going out with Mrs. Beauclerc. I expect her every moment," said Cilla, returning to her post of observation at the window.

"Oh!" remarked Grandston, in a piqued tone. "You cannot spare a moment for me, I suppose?"

Something in his tone made Cilla look round.

"Oh! yes," she replied quite naturally. "Have you a message to give me for Thea?"

"No," he uttered petulantly, walking to the

chimney-glass and giving an irritated jerk to his collar. Then he turned, and coming towards her with a slight flush on his good-looking face, said,

"Why do you hate me? What have I ever done to you? Why should you be the only woman in the world who hasn't got a civil word for me?"

Cilla was quite taken aback by this address, but being remarkably quick at jumping at conclusions, it occurred to her that he either had proposed or was about to propose to Dorothea and wished to invoke her kindly and sisterly feeling. So she gave him a charming and friendly glance out of her beautiful eyes, and said in the most gracious manner in the world,

"Oh, indeed you are mistaken. Please do not think such a thing for a moment."

Grandston's vanity made him as completely mistake Cilla's meaning as she had just mistaken his. He seized her hand, and with a glance of unmistakable passion whispered,

"My darling!"

A thunderbolt at her feet could scarcely have disconcerted Cilla more. His look and words were not by any possible means to be mistaken for an impulse of brotherly affection—she turned from white to red; drew her hand hastily away from him and crossed over to the other side of the room.

To her intense relief, the door was again thrown open, and a waiter announced that Mrs. Beauclerc

was waiting in the carriage for Miss St. George. Without a syllable of farewell or excuse to Grandston, so great was her perturbation, Cilla left the room and descended the stairs. Her heart was beating violently—there was a strange look in her eyes.

"Why, my dear child, what has happened!" cried Angie as soon as the footman had shut the door and was mounting the box.

"Nothing," answered the girl in a smothered voice. She could not even tell Angie, who was the recipient of most of her confidences, this.

For some days afterwards she avoided Grandston persistently—when he called at the hotel, if she was in the drawing-room, she left it immediately and she took good care never to be there alone.

Dorothea ably seconded her efforts—she had a horrible inkling of the truth, and it almost maddened her. She could have borne any rival in the world, she thought, rather than her sister. Grandston's temper was worse than ever—he constantly inquired for Cilla, and, if she failed to make her appearance, was silent and sulky and did not stay long. For the first time in her life Lady Belhaven was really unhappy. All her love, all her ambition was centred on Grandston, and she could not but see that he was slipping from her grasp.

Another anxiety beset her. She was living beyond her income—she had spent a great deal more money

than she ought to have done abroad, and retrenchment seemed impossible. Why, even now, she had to deny herself a hundred things that she wanted, and this hotel life was as detestable as it was expensive.

Dorothea began to have remorseful thoughts about poor Belhaven. They would never have crossed her brain had she been happy and prosperous; but when things go badly with us, and sorrows and disappointments crowd round us, we begin to repent of our sins and of having made others suffer.

The climax was not long in coming. Lord Grandston had no idea of biding his time or waiting for the things he desired to come to him. He always snatched at them, and, truth to tell, generally grasped them, though sometimes when they came, they failed to afford him the pleasure he had expected. He was following in the steps of Solomon and of all those to whom their pleasures and desires come without an effort—the only thing that could pique him now was opposition—difficulty.

One evening he invited himself to dine with Lady Belhaven. Cilla could not take refuge with Angie as was her wont, because that lady was going to the play with a party. During dinner Grandston seemed rather inclined to be petulant and to contradict his hostess. There was an unusual brilliancy in his eyes, and a casual observer might have been pardoned for fancying that he had been drinking

more than was good for him. If her ladyship remarked it, she did not think anything of it, but Cilla had an unspeakable horror of a man under the influence, however slightly, of wine, and was more silent and cold than ever in her behaviour to him. He did not fail to remark this and showed that he was irritated and provoked by it. Dorothea used her utmost endeavours to conciliate him and to smooth his ruffled feathers, but she only succeeded in making him worse. Cilla was divided between anger and disgust for his lordship and sympathy for her sister—she knew well enough what Dorothea's hopes and fears were, although they had never been confided to her.

Dinner was over—the servants had retired. Grandston suddenly made such an unprovoked attack on Lady Belhaven, that, overcome by her feelings, she rose hastily, left the table and retired to her room which opened out of the sitting-room.

"Thank Heaven for that!" uttered Grandston as the door closed upon her.

In an instant Cilla's fiery spirit blazed up.

"I do not know, Lord Grandston," she said, speaking all the more coldly because of the fierceness of her indignation, "what your idea may be of the conduct becoming a gentleman—perhaps you think your rank entitles you to insult a lady at her own table. My sister may submit to your behaviour

if she chooses, but I shall not; and if you do not leave the room this moment," (rising) "I will."

Grandston was dumb-foundered. But as she moved towards the door, he rose from his seat and making a dash for it placed his back against it.

"Don't be angry!" he entreated, looking quite humbly and crestfallenly at the slim young girl whose attitude was as imperious and disdainful as that of a young queen. "I'm awfully sorry if I've offended you, but it's all through you that I feel so worried and unsettled."

"I do not understand you," said Cilla very coldly, feeling however a most unpleasant sense of trepidation. The expression of his face and the tone in which his words were uttered left her in no doubt as to his meaning. "I shall be much obliged if you will come away from the door or let me pass."

"No, I won't, by Jove!" he cried passionately, "not until I have said what I want to."

"Then I shall go through my sister's room," uttered Cilla with a determined air, though in her heart she was terribly frightened. She felt sure that if Lady Belhaven were listening she could hear every word that passed.

With that, Grandston left the door and seized her by both hands. She dared not struggle nor cry out for fear of Dorothea.

"Let me go this instant!" she said in a smothered voice. "Do you hear?" and she looked at him with

blazing eyes, whilst she tried to wrench away her hands.

"Don't make me hurt you!" he said entreatingly. "Just listen to me quietly for a moment."

"I will not," she answered. "I do not wish to hear anything you have to say."

"Then you shall!" he answered fiercely, entirely unused to have his love-making treated so contemptuously. Above all when, positively for the first time in his life, he was prepared to make an offer of marriage.

All of a sudden it struck him that Cilla misunderstood his intentions and was repulsing him on that account. In an instant he changed his tone and spoke quite tenderly and gently, though he still kept hold of her hands.

"You don't understand me, darling," he said. "I love you awfully and I want to marry you."

And he gazed eagerly into her eyes, expecting to see some sudden and wonderful transformation there. But, instead, she looked more angry than ever.

"I detest you," she cried. "I would not marry you for anything in the world."

For a moment he was literally stupefied, and Cilla took the opportunity to release herself from his grasp and fly towards the door. She felt literally furious at his cruelty and treachery to her sister.

Then mingled rage and passion took possession

of Grandston and he caught her in his arms, held her head back by main force, and kissed her a dozen times. And at this juncture, Dorothea flung open her door and stood before them looking a very good study for one of the Furies. Grandston released Cilla, who fled from the room burning with shame and indignation. Locking herself into her own apartment, she burst into a passion of tears. The indignity she had been subjected to; her fear of her sister's wrathful spite, which she knew full well would be wreaked on her; her sense of loneliness and friendlessness; all combined to fill her with despair. She was utterly blameless, yet how, after this terrible scene, was she to face Dorothea?

That question was answered soon enough. Ten minutes had scarcely elapsed before Lady Belhaven rapped sharply at her door. She had been worsted in her encounter with Grandston, who listened with utter indifference to her passionate reproaches and was brutal enough to tell her that he had never intended to marry her and that he was determined to marry her sister, who was the first woman to whom he had ever proposed. Then he left her, and Dorothea, maddened with disappointment, rushed to Cilla's room to wreak her fury.

Stammering with rage, her face distorted by hatred, she terrified Cilla who had never believed her capable of such violence. She ordered her at once to leave the house and go anywhere, out into

the street, she cared not where, but the same roof should never cover them again until the day of their death. Cilla attempted an explanation. Dorothea would not hear a word, but heaped all manner of false and horrible accusations upon her sister, vowing that it was she who had led Grandston on and from sheer malice had by artifice and subterfuge tried to lure him away from her. Cilla became so frightened at Lady Belhaven's violence that, hastily throwing on her cloak and bonnet, and not even waiting to change her thin little French shoes, she ran downstairs and bade the porter call her a cab. It wanted ten minutes to ten by the hall clock. Mrs. Beauclerc was at the play, but she would drive to her house and wait for her return. She was quite sure of shelter there, for the night at all events. She was somewhat embarrassed to think what she should say to Angie's butler, but he was sufficiently well-mannered not to exhibit any surprise at her appearance at so late an hour. Indeed he had a shrewd idea that some little plot was going on, for, ten minutes before, Mr. Vereker had arrived from the country and had also intimated his intention of waiting until Mrs. Beauclerc's return. He was quite aware of the former engagement of the gentleman and the young lady and of its rupture, and he now imagined that this was a manœuvre of his mistress to bring the young people together again. Though it certainly struck him as an odd time to choose for their meet-

ing, still "the ways of swells was so rum" that he no longer allowed himself to be surprised at anything they did. He considered that in not mentioning to Miss St. George Mr. Vereker's presence in the drawing-room, he was acting with a diplomacy that entitled him to universal respect and admiration.

We may imagine, then, how startled Duke and Cilla were to find themselves suddenly face to face.

The butler shut the door and retired, reflecting to himself that if they were acting a part to each other they did it uncommon well.

The pair, however, were so confounded and embarrassed that they forgot even to greet each other in the customary manner.

"I did not know—I had no idea—" stammered Cilla blushing.

"Why, what on earth brings you out at this time of night?" asked Duke, feeling for the moment as though he had the right to ask. Then recollecting himself he said, "I beg your pardon," and turned towards the chimney-piece.

Cilla sat down in the chair by the fire.

"Mrs. Beauclerc is at the play," remarked Duke in a forced, company-sort of voice presently.

"Yes," returned Cilla in the same tone. "She and the Blanks have gone to see 'Hamlet.'"

And then silence fell between them. Cilla was so shaken by the events of the evening that she felt incapable of making conversation, and Duke's formal,

constrained manner inspired a sense of increased desolation in her lonely heart. And to-night, above all nights, she was so sorely in want of sympathy—she would have been so glad if he would have evinced a little of the old kindness, the old interest in her. She contrasted him with Grandston who, by comparison, seemed everything that was hateful and despicable.

After standing silent for two or three minutes, Duke began to walk about the room under the pretence of looking at various photographs and bits of china. Then, as if struck by a sudden thought, he said briskly,

"After all, I don't think it's any use my waiting for Mrs. Beauclerc. I daresay she'll be tired and won't care to be kept up. So," retreating to the door, "I'll say good night."

"Good night," responded Cilla coldly, whilst her heart sank within her and she felt more forlorn than ever. She would have been so glad to tell him her troubles, if he had given her the smallest encouragement.

She heard him descend the stairs, heard the front door open and shut, and then she burst into a passion of tears. Never had she experienced a keener sense of mortification, of humiliation. She had no power over this man who once loved her so devotedly and whom she now looked on with such different eyes.

The sound of the drawing-room door suddenly opening made her spring to her feet and stand gazing into the fire to conceal her face from the person entering. It was Duke returned. As he opened the front door, he remembered that he wanted to leave a message for Angie. He had looked into the dining-room intending to write a note, but as all was darkness, he concluded to return to the drawing-room and leave a verbal message with Cilla. He came up to the chimney-piece and saw in a moment that she was crying—he could never bear to see a woman in tears, far less this girl whom he had loved so tenderly.

"What is it?" he said very softly—"what has vexed you?" and he took one of her fragile-looking hands in his. And at this simple expression of sympathy on his part, Cilla's tears rained forth afresh—she seemed to have lost all control over herself and sobbed like a child.

"Hush, my darling," entreated Duke, moved to involuntary tenderness by the sight of her grief. Then he drew her head against his shoulder, and she left it there with a sense of utter relief and contentment, such as she had never in her life felt before. He was so strong, so kind, so good—she felt so utterly helpless.

And Duke, as he stood there, clasping that dear hand, stroking the silk of that little head and once and again stooping to lay his lips to it, felt all the

old love surging back. He tried with all his might to check and subdue it. What was the use of opening the old wound? Something had vexed her—her nerves were upset—because she leaned her head against his breast, it was no sign that she cared for him; only that, like a child, she wanted to be soothed and comforted.

Presently he drew her to a sofa and sat beside her, still holding her hand.

"Tell me," he said gently, "what has happened—what makes you unhappy?"

And Cilla told him how her sister had turned her out of the hotel because of Grandston who, she said, had insulted her. She did not say how, nor did she mention his offer of marriage which indeed she hardly realised or believed in.

Duke pronounced Lady Belhaven's behaviour infamous, but was she quite sure, he asked, that she had not given Grandston some encouragement? Cilla repudiated the idea with the greatest indignation. Then Duke said soothingly that it would be sure to come all right, and that, in the morning, Lady Belhaven would see reason, but, anyhow, Mrs. Beauclerc would stand her friend and do everything in the world for her.

And as they talked with happy confidence together, Duke had wild dreams about the future, and Cilla wondered how she could have been so

blind and stupid as not to value his love when it was hers.

The thunder of the knocker put their dreams and reflections to flight. Duke jumped up.

"I will see Mrs. Beauclerc as I go out," he said. "You would rather, I know, have your talk to yourselves. Good-bye. God bless you!" And he kissed her hand and went off to meet Angie. He only detained her long enough to say that Lady Belhaven had behaved infamously; that he would leave Cilla to tell her own story, and come and see them both next morning.

We may be quite sure with what hearty sympathy Mrs. Beauclerc listened to Cilla's recital, and how warmly she insisted on the girl making her house her home for the present.

Cilla went to bed happier than she had been for ages. She was under the roof of her best and dearest friend, and she cherished a hope in her heart that it was not altogether too late to repair her lost opportunities. The future did not present quite such a blank aspect as it had seemed to do three hours before. But a bitter disappointment was in store for her. Instead of Duke next morning, there came a letter from him to Angie saying that he had gone back to the Court again, as he did not think London the best place for him just at that time, and as Cilla was with her, he should not be able to see as much of her as he wished.

Angie told the contents of his letter to Cilla in a softened manner, and Cilla's speaking face betrayed in an instant how keenly she was disappointed.

"I was so in hopes," said Angie kindly, "that you two young people would come together again after last night."

"Of course he would never think of me again," answered Cilla bitterly. "How can he? Why should he?"

"If he did," observed Angie tentatively, "I suppose it would be no use?"

Cilla did not answer, but two great tears rolled down her cheeks.

At half-past twelve, as she was putting on her bonnet to walk with Angie, Lord Grandston's card was brought to her. His lordship was in the drawing-room. Cilla flew to Angie in great excitement. Nothing in the world, she declared, would induce her to see him. Would Angie go to him? and Angie went.

Grandston was in a state of extreme penitence, and expressed himself overcome with remorse for his behaviour the previous evening. He implored Mrs. Beauclerc to use her influence with Miss St. George to induce her to see him if only for five minutes—he had something of the greatest importance to say to her.

Angie was very kind—she had known him a

long time and he was always on his best behaviour with her.

"It is no use," she said quite frankly to him. "Your conduct last night is really not to be easily looked over, and Cilla is resolved not to see you."

Then Grandston grew excited—almost tearful.

"Look here, Mrs. Beauclerc," he cried, "I was a brute—I know it. I think I must have been drunk; but I love that girl awfully. I want to marry her. I'll go down on my knees to ask her, if that will satisfy her."

Angie's breath was fairly taken away. The Marquis of Grandston, almost the best match in England, proposing to marry Cilla! As a woman; as a woman of the world; it was her bounden duty to insist on Cilla's considering such an offer. For her own part, she should certainly not go against his suit. So, in the kindest manner in the world, she promised to make his peace with Cilla; at all events to induce her to see him at five o'clock that afternoon.

"But I can't bear the suspense," cried Grandston in an agitated voice; "I can't indeed."

However, Angie finally induced him to accede to her suggestion and he left the house with a very woe-begone air.

Angie rushed upstairs to Cilla.

"My dear child!" she cried, throwing herself into an arm-chair. "He wants to marry you."

"Does he?" uttered Cilla clenching her small teeth in a manner that expressed volumes.

"This requires the most serious reflection," pursued Angie.

"Not on my part," returned Cilla.

"But, my love! to be Marchioness of Grandston! Just think what a position! And he is a very nice, good-looking boy, and will be enormously rich. And he has charming manners."

"Charming manners!" reiterated Cilla raising her voice. "He is the rudest, coarsest, most selfish creature I ever met. I assure you, dear Mrs. Beauclerc," more gently, "I have had ample opportunity of studying his real nature. If you had seen as much of him as I have, you would think him utterly detestable. I never could imagine what Thea saw in him to be so fond of. Why I would rather," with great energy, "marry—"

But here she had to pause in order to think of some one sufficiently detestable to point her remark with.

"Duke?" suggested Angie maliciously.

"Duke!" cried Cilla and the tears started to her eyes. "I would rather marry Duke without a penny than Lord Grandston with millions."

"Then, my dear," observed Angie drily, "why did you not take Duke when you had the chance?"

"Because I was mad—because I was wicked—

because—— I don't know why," said Cilla in floods of tears.

So when his lordship returned in the afternoon, Mrs. Beauclerc was obliged to see him again on behalf of Cilla who had gone out of the house to avoid him, and he was so fierce and angry at his disappointment that Angie had the opportunity of seeing a little of his real nature.

Lady Belhaven sent her sister's maid and wardrobe to Angie's house where she rightly concluded Cilla had taken refuge. As the days wore on and no word or sign came from her, Mrs. Beauclerc thought it only right to ascertain what her ideas and intentions were with regard to Cilla, and called upon her ladyship at the hotel. Angie felt a certain degree of compassion for Lady Belhaven under her severe disappointment and went disposed to be all that was kind and conciliatory, but Dorothea was so exceedingly rude and made such very disagreeable innuendoes that Angie, in her own dignified manner, thought well to punish her ladyship by telling her of Grandston's proposal for her sister's hand and of his mortification at her refusal. Thereupon Lady Belhaven fell into such a torrent of abuse of her sister and uttered such false and shocking accusations against her, that Angie cut her short by retiring in the midst of her tirade with a most expressive look of contempt and disgust.

"Never mind, my love," she said to Cilla, "you shall live with me until you marry."

"You had better not say that for your own sake," answered Cilla with a melancholy smile.

"We shall see," cried Angie gaily.

A few nights later at a small dance to which the two ladies went, they met Mr. and Mrs. Deerbrook.

"Now," thought Angie to herself, "we shall see."

Cis lost no time in approaching them. After saying a few words to Angie, he turned with his most speaking look to Cilla. Angie watched the pair narrowly; Cilla betrayed no emotion, but there was an expression of cold contempt in her eyes that one would hardly have expected to see in so young a woman. He asked her to dance; she declined simply and without any show of feeling, and, as another man approached, she rose, took his arm and walked away. Twice later, Deerbrook tried to get speech of her but in vain. Next day he wrote to her—she found the letter when she came in from her drive.

"Do you know that writing?" she asked of Angie.

"It is Cis Deerbrook's, is it not?" said that lady.

"Yes," answered Cilla, throwing it unopened into the fire.

The same evening Angie wrote a long letter to Duke.

He answered it by return of post. But he still insisted, in spite of all she told him, that he was better away. She wrote a second and a third time; then he came.

Captain Beauclerc was absent—the three dined together very cheerily and gaily. It was the first time Cilla's heart had ever beat at the thought of seeing Duke—the first time her hand had ever thrilled or trembled at his touch.

After dinner, Angie, like the kind-hearted match-maker and good woman that she was, found a pretext for leaving them together. Cilla went to the piano and sang Duke's favourite song.

There was exquisite pathos in her voice—there was passion besides.

When she finished, Duke came over to the piano and looked steadily into her eyes. Then he turned sharply away and went back to the fire. She rose softly and followed him—she could see there was a great struggle going on in his breast. He was fighting against her influence, but she meant to conquer.

"Duke," she said and raised her beautiful eyes to his and put out one little hand towards him. There was no cold, repellent look in her eyes now; no look of strangled dislike and fear such as he had often seen there in the old days.

He looked at her for a moment and then said almost passionately,

"Why do you want to torment me?"

"Torment you!" she murmured in the most entrancing whisper. "How?"

"You do not care for me," he cried fiercely, "you know you do not. You never did."

"Do I not?" she said again, and then kept silence until perforce he turned and looked at her.

Certainly unless the very devil of falseness lurked behind those lovely orbs, it would have been hard to deny that the feeling they expressed was love.

"Oh, child!" he cried almost beside himself, "is it possible?" Then, restraining himself by a violent effort, he said,

"No! unless you tell me you love me of your own free will; unless you first put your lips to mine, I will not believe it."

Then Cilla blushing, and trembling like a leaf it is true, gave the evidence of love that was required of her. Duke was resolved to test her feelings to the uttermost; he kissed her a dozen times, watching with strange intensity for the sign of repugnance that was to betray her if she were playing a part.

But at last he was fain to be satisfied.

"Am I dreaming?" he said. "Oh, my love, if this is true, what has changed you—or else why could you not care for me before?"

"I cannot tell," she whispered. "But all I know —all I care to know is that I love you now. Do

you like me to say it? Yes, with all my heart I love you. Are you satisfied?"

Some time after—I know not how long—Angie, coming in, found Duke sitting on a big stool at Cilla's feet. Angie was a woman of quick perceptions.

"Am I to say 'Bless you, my children'?" she asked smiling.

"Yes, dear, guardian angel," cried Duke, putting his arm round her and kissing her cheek, "it would not be perfect without that."

THE END.

PRINTING OFFICE OF THE PUBLISHER.

PR
4161
B59M8

Bridges, (Mrs. Colonel)
My lord and my lady

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY